

Navajos seek tribal-dominated district

PHOENIX (AP) — As the Hopi Tribe signaled a new willingness to share representation in Washington, the Navajo Nation proposed last week that Arizona's new congressional districts include one with enough Native Americans to elect one of their own to Congress.

The Navajo and Hopi tribes in the past have had cool and even bitter relations, but Hopi Chairman LeRoy Shingoitewa said it makes sense for the two groups to be in the same district in order to have more collective clout on issues of common concern.

"The concept is what is good for tribes, not just one tribe," Shingoitewa said.

Leonard Gorman, executive director of the Navajo Nation's human rights commission presented the state's redistricting commission with several proposals that if implemented would dramatically redraw the landscape of much of rural Arizona.

Both of the Navajos' two congressional proposals would create a rural-dominated district

covering eastern Arizona and much of northern Arizona, taking in the Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai, White Mountain Apache and San Carlos Apache reservations.

Both versions would reach southward to Cochise County on the U.S.-Mexico border, with one extending westward to include the Tohono O'odham Nation in southern Arizona and the other going through Pinal County to include the Gila River Indian Community.

Such a district, Gorman said, would put enough Native Americans in the district to ensure that their voting rights are protected and make it possible to have a Native American elected to represent Arizona in Congress for the first time, Gorman said.

A separate proposal by the Navajos would redraw the current legislative district that now includes the reservation to include less of Flagstaff and more of Apache and Navajo counties south of the reservation.

The Navajos 10 years ago proposed similar redistricting

plans, but were thwarted. A former commission member from non-reservation areas of Arizona succeeded in preserving a legislative district that excluded the Navajo Reservation, which instead was placed in the same district with Flagstaff.

The Navajo Reservation is now part of Arizona's 1st Congressional District, which includes Prescott and Flagstaff and most of east-central and northeastern Arizona — but not the Hopi Reservation though it is surrounded by the much larger Navajo Reservation.

At the time, the Hopis objected to being in the same congressional district with the Navajos on grounds that the more numerous Navajos would have more clout in Washington on land and other issues in dispute between the two tribes.

That resulted in the last redistricting commission drawing the congressional districts to have one extend inside another in order to place the Navajo and Hopi reservations in separate districts.

But the tribes' relations since have improved, and Shingoitewa said he expects the Hopi Tribal Council soon will consider a resolution on forging a common front with the Navajos on redistricting.

"Things have changed," Shingoitewa said. "Life has changed, and we live in a political world, and when you deal with politics, you need strength in numbers sometimes."

Commission Chairwoman Colleen Mathis later said a willingness by the Hopis to share a district with the Navajos would provide the commission with more flexibility.

Asked about the feasibility of drawing a congressional district as envisioned by the Navajos, Mathis said it would have to be measured against the full set of redistricting mandates. Those include creating competitive districts and respecting undefined communities of interest, as well as protecting minorities' voting rights.

"It's intriguing," she said during an interview.

Mohegan Sun reports steep revenue drop

UNCASVILLE, Conn. (AP) — The Mohegan Sun says slot revenue plunged 10.6 percent in August.

The Indian-run casino said Thursday that revenue was \$59.9 million, down from \$67 million in August 2010.

It was the steepest drop in months. Revenue at the

southeastern Connecticut casino dropped between 3 percent and 6 percent in the past few months due to weak consumer spending and increased competition in the Northeast.

The Mohegan Sun did not elaborate on why revenue in August fell.

Okla. tribe's commission allows freedmen to vote

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — The Cherokee Nation's election commission voted Wednesday to allow descendants of slaves once owned by tribal members to cast ballots for principal chief, but they'll only count in the event of a court order.

Federal officials objected to a ruling last month by the tribe's highest court that found only people of direct Cherokee ancestry could be members of the tribe and vote in the upcoming election, essentially denying ballots to some 2,800 freedmen descendants.

While the election commission's vote doesn't directly overturn the ruling by the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court, it does allow for freedmen to cast provisional ballots in an effort to make the election results stand, regardless of how the courts ultimately rule.

"If a court decides the freedmen descendants can vote we will have the ability to certify the election," Election Commission chairwoman Susan Plumb said. "If the court decides they cannot vote, we will still be able to preserve the election."

The longstanding dispute between the tribe and the freedmen has only complicated the Sept. 24 special election between former Chief Chad Smith and tribal council member Bill John Baker.

Tribal Supreme Court justices tossed results of the original June 25 election after finding the winner of the contest

couldn't be determined with a mathematical certainty. A new election was ordered.

The election has drawn national interest because while the tribe is based in Tahlequah, many of its 300,000 members live outside Oklahoma.

On Aug. 22, the tribe's high court overturned a tribal district court ruling that nullified the 2007 constitutional amendment on grounds that it violated an 1866 treaty between the tribe and federal government that granted former slaves citizenship. The justices disagreed, saying the treaty never afforded citizenship to the ex-slaves.

After the tribe sent out letters kicking freedmen descendants out of the tribe and stripping them of their voting rights and benefits, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development froze \$33 million in funds to the tribe. Earlier this week, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk wrote a sternly worded letter disagreeing with the tribal court decision.

"I urge you to consider carefully the nation's next steps in proceeding with an election that does not comply with federal law," Echo Hawk wrote in a letter Friday to acting Chief S. Joe Crittenden. "The department will not recognize any action taken by the nation that is inconsistent with these principles and does not accord its freedmen members full rights of citizenship."

Gallup builds 'world's largest Navajo taco'

GALLUP, N.M. (AP) — Residents in Gallup have set the record for world's largest Navajo taco using 150 pieces of fry bread and, of course, more than 30 pounds of green chile, New Mexico officials and organizers said Monday.

According to volunteers and state officials, the Navajo taco created Saturday was more than 10 feet in diameter and also needed 65 pounds of ground beef, 65 pounds of beans, 50 pounds of lettuce and 90 pounds of cheese.

Bill Lee, executive director of the Gallup McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, said there was no record for the world's largest Navajo taco in the Guinness Book of World Record, so residents created one. "We just decided we would establish the record," said Lee. "There wasn't anything on the books officially."

Lee said the objective was to highlight tourism in Gallup, a city located near the Navajo Nation, and to bring residents together for a cause.

Among those that help built the massive taco were Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney and employees from area businesses. McKinney finished the construction by using a cherry-picker truck to sprinkle diced tomatoes in the taco's center.

Afterward, residents and organizers were treated to a free lunch.

The event was part of the New Mexico Tourism Department's "Catch the Kid" summer travel promotion scavenger hunt.

Ski Bowl

The area at Government Camp that many people from Warm Springs remember as Tom, Dick, & Harry has been developed into a ski and adventure resort known as Ski Bowl. Kirk Hanna, owner of the Ski Bowl, wants to open this area that was once a huckleberry picking grounds for the river tribes. Hanna has invited the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs back to the area to continue their traditions and to partner in the development of an Interpretive Center. On Friday, Sept. 9 Ski Bowl provided vans and transported tribal members wanting to pick berries and enjoy the mountain. Culture and Heritage staff will be partnering with the Ski Bowl staff and the U.S. Forest Service to create an area where the 10,000 plus annual visitors can learn about the history of the mountain from the perspective of Tribal people.



Yvonne Iverson/Spilyay photos



Group picture taken after the blessing of the building that will house the interpretive center.

Man pleads guilty in artifacts case

MOAB, Utah (AP) — A southeastern Utah school teacher has pleaded guilty to charges that he illegally sold a Native American turkey feather blanket and a prehistoric women's apron.

Blanding resident David A. Lacy entered the plea in U.S. District Court as he faced three misdemeanor counts of trafficking stolen artifacts. Prosecutors say Lacy sold the artifacts to an undercover informant in 2007.

Lacy is set for sentencing in December. U.S. Magistrate Judge Samuel Alba also sentenced two other people in the ongoing trafficking case.

Kevin Shumway, 58, of Blanding was ordered to 12 months of probation for his role in helping Lacy sell the artifacts.

The Rulon Kody Sommerville, 50, of Monticello was ordered to 12 months of probation for selling a Native American knife.

Wampanoag Tribe gets justice grant

BOSTON (AP) — The U.S. Department of Justice has awarded the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head more than half a million dollars for its tribal justice system.

The Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe of Martha's Vineyard will use the money to continue its traditional tribal justice system, designed to enable greater self-governance and strengthen the tribe's economic and cultural

health.

U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz announced the \$567,000 award under the Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation, an application for tribal-specific grant programs offered by the Justice Department. The department awarded \$118.4 million to nearly 150 American Indian and Alaskan Native nations around the country.

Former tribal business council chair gets prison

GREAT FALLS, Mont. (AP) — The U.S. attorney's office says the former chairman of the Chippewa Cree tribal business council has been sentenced to more than a year in prison and ordered to pay nearly \$59,000 in restitution for using a tribal credit card for personal use.

Raymond "Jake" Parker Jr., was sentenced Monday in Great Falls to 16 months in prison after pleading guilty in

May to theft from an Indian tribal organization. He will be on supervised release for three years after he finishes his prison term.

Prosecutors allege Parker used a tribal credit card to make \$22,000 in purchases.

Most of the purchases were made at restaurants, hotels and gas stations; and he took out nearly \$37,000 in cash advances, including advances taken in Las Vegas and Reno, Nev.

Teleco: quality service to tribes

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Tribal lands are the most underserved in the country. While most of America has about 95 percent telephone service available, most tribes have about 60-65 percent of their population served by a telephone company.

Significantly fewer members have access to broadband. This cannot continue.

The NTTA has proposed that in the reorganization of the USF to the CAF, that there be a particular pool of money designated for tribal telcos.

This money would be used to bring some level of equality to the tribes that have been ignored and underserved by the telephone companies that were to bring service to these lands.

This is a very complicated issue. With the help of the NTTA and the filings that they have made, we hope that the FCC will recognize the special needs of tribes, and this time, help fund the subsidies that tribal companies, including Warm Springs Telecom, need to enable better services for tribal lands.