

Bill seeks to end Tigua blood rule

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President Barack Obama is expected to sign a bill into law that will ensure the Tiguas remain a federally recognized and sovereign tribe.

U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-El Paso, authored the legislation, which the U.S. Senate passed earlier this week.

The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (Tiguas) Blood Quantum Bill (H.R. 1560) will eliminate the one-eighth blood requirement for the Tiguas. The bill is headed next to the White House for the president's approval.

"We are very excited about this," said Tiguas Lt. Gov. Carlos Hisa. "The word is spreading like wildfire. This will allow us to determine our citizenship, and who can be a member. It's all about sovereignty and self-governance as a nation."

Hisa also said the bill will enable the tribe to double its membership in a short time.

The Tiguas had tried for more than 20 years to get the blood quantum removed as the principal measure for membership. Of the 565 federally recognized Native American tribes in the United States, the Tigua tribe was the only one whose membership was determined by the federal government instead of by its own members.

The new legislation will allow the Tiguas to preserve their heritage based on shared history, customs and language, in addition to tribal blood.

"We reached an important and crucial milestone when the Senate approved my legislation to preserve the federally recognized status of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo by eliminating the unfairly imposed one-eighth blood quantum requirement," Reyes said.

The tribe, which has about 1,700 members, employs 400 people in various jobs and capacities. It owns a majority stake in the Diablos baseball team and leases Cohen Stadium from the city.

The Tiguas own Speaking Rock Entertainment Center in the Lower Valley, Socorro Entertainment Center in Socorro and the 70,460-acre Chilicote cattle ranch in West Texas.

In a statement, the Tigua Tribal Council said the bill had been the tribe's highest legislative priority: "Determining our own membership requirements not only benefits our individual members, but it enables us to exercise our rights as a sovereign nation in safeguarding the existence of the entire pueblo.

"We are extremely grateful to Congressman Reyes and the entire team who worked on getting this vital legislation passed," the council said.

Hisa said he hopes Tigua leaders will be able to travel to the White House to see Obama sign the bill.

According to the Texas State Historical Association, the Tiguas are descendants of refugees from lower Rio Grande pueblos who accompanied the Spaniards to El Paso on their retreat from New Mexico during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

The Tiguas' settlement was named Ysleta del Sur (Ysleta of the South), to distinguish it from its former home in Isleta, N.M., near Albuquerque.

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