

**TESTIMONY OF
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND
ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 1560**

JUNE 22, 2011

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Jodi Gillette. I am the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior (Department). I am here today to provide the Department's position on H.R. 1560, a bill to amend the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama Coushatta Indian Tribes of Texas Restoration Act to allow the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Tribe to determine blood quantum requirements for membership in their Tribe. The Department supports H.R. 1560.

BACKGROUND

In 1987 Congress passed the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama and Coushatta Indian Tribes of Texas Restoration Act (Restoration Act), which restored the federal trust relationship between the federal government and the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (Tribe).

The Restoration Act, (25 U.S.C. §1300G-7(a)(2)(i)), prescribes membership for the Tribe to only those individuals on the Tribe's 1984 Membership Roll, and to their descendants with at least 1/8 or more Tigua-Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Indian blood and who are enrolled by the Tribe. This codified criterion has been adopted into Article 3, Section 3.01, of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Code of Laws. Currently the tribal enrollment for the Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo is 1,691 members. Indian Affairs cannot find any other instances where a Tribe's membership is bound by a blood quantum requirement under Federal statute.

H.R. 1560

H.R. 1560 would amend the Restoration Act to enable the Tribe to determine for themselves the blood-quantum requirements, if any, for membership into the Tribe. The proposed amendment would delete the 1/8 blood quantum requirement and replace the current requirement with "any person of Tigua-Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Indian blood enrolled by the tribe." This amendment would allow the Tribe to determine their own enrollment criteria, as any other federally-recognized tribe has the right to do.

While the legislation would allow the Tribe to determine the size of its own membership, the Department does not expect an additional Tribal Priority Allocation base funding amount to be awarded to the Tribe.

Indian tribes have the inherent authority to determine their membership. The Supreme Court has noted, “A tribe’s right to define its own membership for tribal purposes has long been recognized as central to its existence as an independent political community.” *See Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martinez*, 436 U.S. 49 (1978). The Department is in receipt of copies of tribal resolutions from the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Tribal Council in support of the change to the blood quantum requirements stated within the legislation. The Department supports the Tribe’s request to determine its criteria for membership, which is consistent with the Administration’s support for the policies of Self-Governance and Self-Determination for all federally recognized tribes.

CONCLUSION

This concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.