

JANUARY 30, 2019

New Mexico Delegation Leads Introduction of Bipartisan, Bicameral Bill to Reauthorize Native American Language Programs

WASHINGTON – Today, **U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.)**, vice chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and **Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.)**, along with **U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.)** and **U.S. Representatives Deb Haaland (D-N.M.)** and **Xochitl Torres Small (D-N.M.)**, introduced the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act to strengthen Tribally-developed Native American language revitalization programs.

The bill is named after Esther Martinez, an Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo traditional storyteller and Tewa language advocate who passed away in 2006. It amends existing law to reauthorize two federal Native American language programs at the Administration for Native Americans until 2024, expand eligibility for those programs to smaller-sized Tribal language programs, and allow both programs to offer longer grant periods.

“Esther Martinez’s advocacy for Native languages has inspired generations of Native Americans and New Mexicans,” **said Udall**. “Native languages hold

within them the culture, the history, and the resiliency of Native communities. And when we invest in revitalizing these languages, we also invest in rebuilding connections between generations of Native Americans and promoting higher academic achievement outcomes among Native youth. I'm proud to once again lead this legislation to honor Esther Martinez's legacy and support programs that promote Tribes' work to maintain and revitalize Native languages."

"The preservation of language is essential to the sovereignty and continuation of the rich history and cultural traditions of Native and tribal communities. Yet, too many Native languages will face extinction in the coming decades without sustained intervention," **said Luján**. "I'm proud to join my colleagues in supporting legislation to reauthorize programs that strengthen Native American language immersion programs."

"Preserving Native languages is central to maintaining cultural identity," **said Heinrich**. "I'm proud to honor Esther Martinez's legacy by ensuring that Native students are connected to their language and that their rich culture and traditions can be handed down to future generations."

"The resilience of Indigenous culture lies in keeping our languages and traditions alive, but many times the resources needed to continue those cultural education programs is lacking or completely absent. That's why we're honoring the legacy of Pueblo storyteller and self-taught linguist, Esther Martinez, by supporting programs that promote academic success by sustaining our languages and traditions," **said Haaland**, one of the first Native American women elected to Congress and member of the Pueblo of Laguna.

“I’m proud to join the New Mexico delegation to honor Esther Martinez’s legacy and ensure our Native and tribal languages live on and are passed down to future generations,” **said Torres Small**. “By increasing access to reach more rural areas, not only do we ensure the vitality of these languages but protect the unique cultural identity and rich history of New Mexico.”

This bill is co-led by U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.), and U.S. Representatives Betty McCollum (D-Minn.), Don Young (R-Alaska), and Sharice Davids (D-Kansas). It is also supported by the National Congress of American Indians and the National Indian Education Association.

“The protection and preservation of our Native languages is crucial to the cultural identity and success of tribal nations and tribal citizens,” **said Jefferson Keel, President of the National Congress of American Indians**. “We thank Vice-Chairman Udall for reintroducing the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act, which provides tribal nations the critical resources needed to ensure Native languages will continue to be spoken for generations to come.”

"Preserving and promoting Native language is crucial to the advancement of Native education. By introducing and supporting this important program, Congress will ensure every Native student can thrive socially and academically because they are taught their own language. NIEA encourages quick action on this legislation so that Native language can be carefully safeguarded and imparted to our Native children and youth. NIEA especially thanks Senator Udall and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan for their leadership on the

Esther Martinez Native Languages Programs Reauthorization Act and we look forward to working together to generate bipartisan support in Congress. Our longstanding commitment to Native language preservation and revitalization for thriving students and communities will guide our efforts to help pass this important legislation in the 116th Congress,” **said Robin Butterfield, President of the National Indian Education Association.**

“Our language is more than a means of communication it is the cornerstone of our traditional culture, we wholeheartedly support this effort,” **said Ron Lovato, Governor of the Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo.**

Additional cosponsors in the House include Representatives Darren Soto (D-Fla.), Tom Cole (R-Okla.), Gwen Moore (D-Wisc.), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), Scott Tipton (R-Colo.), Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), Tom O’Halleran (D-Ariz.), Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.), Grace Napolitano (D-Calif.), Dan Kildee (D-Mich.), and Tony Cárdenas (D-Calif.).

The full text of the bill is available [HERE](#).