

NCCR Banner
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NAVAJO EVACUATION

Senator Cranston's bill, calling for a moratorium on the forced relocation of Navajo in the Big Mountain area of Arizona, is scheduled to be reintroduced in the new Congress. If it is passed, it will mandate an 18 month moratorium on forced relocations and will establish a commission to conduct hearings into the matter.

The task of the commission will be to hold hearings with the idea of seeking alternatives to the continued implementation of PL 93-531. The commission, for the first time will include Hopi traditional leaders and Navajo elders(those facing evacuation), as part of the panel.

Traditional members of both the Hopi and the Navajo have spoken out against PL 93-531 which has caused a storm of protest throughout the nation. The memories of the darkest days of the evacuation caused a strong surge of support and sympathy from the Japanese American community.

Pictures of homes being destroyed and people being forced to relocate brought back grim reminders to many who suffered through the internment of 1942. The public outcry and the resulting pressure was a major reason for the government temporarily halting its bulldozing policy.

Several changes in the new Senate have made the campaign to repeal PL93-531 stronger. Chief among these was the retirement of Barry Goldwater, whos strongly opposed any changes to PL 93-531. In addition, the recent election has weakened the power of congressional conservatives, who formed the strongest support base for relocation.

In the Navajo nation, Peter MacDonald, a long time former Tribal Chairman, has returned to power. He ran on an anti-relocation platform and many observers feel that he will be a stronger voice for repeal than former Chairman Peterson Zah.

One other form of fighting the relocation is a consideration of a lawsuit that challenges the law as an unconstitutional abridgement of the right to freedom of religion. The suit will be based on the fact that the Navajos of the Big Mountain area will not be able to exercise their religion if they are separated from the land they hold sacred.