



**CONGRESSMAN
ED PASTOR**



2nd District - Arizona

2465 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Web site: www.house.gov/pastor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, June 27, 2001

Contact: Maura Saavedra
(602) 252-2653 or (602) 256-0551
E-MAIL: maura.saavedra@mail.house.gov
Or Tribal rep. Margo Cowan, 520-471-0108

Rep. Pastor proposes bill seeking U.S. citizenship for Tohono O'odham Nation's enrolled members

WASHINGTON - In an effort to correct a historical oversight that has left Tohono O'odham tribal members often unable to travel within their own homeland, U.S. Rep. Ed Pastor, D-Ariz., today introduced a bill that seeks U.S. citizenship for enrolled tribal members.

"When governments created the border between the United States and Mexico, we created a divide that has now made it increasingly difficult for tribal members to travel within the Tohono O'odham Nation," Pastor said. "To put an end to the problem, this legislation would give tribal members citizenship from the day they are placed on the tribal roll, and it would allow membership credentials to be used as the equivalent of a birth certificate for federal government purposes."

Tribal officials greeted the proposed legislation with gratitude.

"The Tohono O'odham Nation thanks Congressman Pastor for acting to resolve this major historical oversight which has, and continues to cause tremendous pain and suffering to our O'odham family," said Chairman Edward D. Manuel. "The international boundary has split our land in half and this situation must be corrected."

Tribal Vice-Chairman Henry A. Ramon added, "We know Congress never intended that our people would not be United States citizens. We call on Congress to make it right."

Tribal officials have been seeking assistance to correct the problem by amending the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 so that all enrolled members become U.S. citizens. While many members had been able to travel freely between the U.S. and Mexico, increased border enforcement in recent years has created hardships for about 8,400 members on both sides of the border. Those who have especially faced hardships were O'odham born in the United States who cannot prove it, O'odham who are Mexican-born but reside in the United States without documents, O'odham who are Mexican-born but cannot travel freely on the Nation's lands in the United States, and Mexican-born children of U.S. citizens whose births cannot be documented.

The bill is expected to be referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary for consideration.