

Navajo Democrat Willie Grayeyes Holds Narrow Lead in San Juan County

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A small but symbolic race in San Juan County has captured the attention of Utahns far outside County Commission District 2, which is home to Utah's portion of the Navajo Nation and the Bears Ears National Monument.

Navajo candidate Willie Grayeyes is leading in the race to be the next district commissioner, which would swing this corner of southeast Utah to Democratic control.

Grayeyes said if he ends up winning he wants to reassure those voters concerned about shifting political control in this historically Republican district. One of Grayeyes' main campaign goals has been to increase county resources and funding in the southern part of the county, on the Navajo Nation.



"As far as I'm concerned, I'm going to practice impartiality and fairness. We have to build that trust," Grayeyes said.

His Republican opponent Kelly Laws was not available for comment.

Kenneth Maryboy, also Navajo and a Democrat, won his race to represent County Commission District 3. Incumbent Republican County Commissioner Bruce Adams will continue to represent District 1.

As of Wednesday night, Grayeyes held a small lead of fewer than 200 votes. In rural San Juan County, those numbers may still change.

According to the local clerk's office, there are 600-800 mail-in ballots that have yet to be counted between all three commission races. More voting numbers will be released on Friday.

Watching The Polls

Election monitors were in San Juan County on Tuesday to make sure voting went smoothly on the Navajo Nation.

Officials were sent to watch the polls from the U.S. Justice Department, Utah Lieutenant Governor's Office, the ACLU and the Rural Utah Project.

The monitors were there because of past complaints from residents during the 2018 primary about overcrowded polling stations and confusion about which precincts voters should be listed in, and an ACLU lawsuit alleging there were a lack of interpreters for Navajo speakers.

In 2016 the ACLU of Utah sued San Juan County to maintain in-person polling places on the Navajo Nation and ensure there were enough Navajo translators. Some residents of the remote county say that voting by mail can be a barrier.

The ACLU's Rachel Appel was in Montezuma Creek, where she said there were only minor issues, like the polling place changing the location from where it was advertised.

"It didn't seem that any voters had trouble realizing or figuring that out," Appel said. "There was signage and there was a steady stream of voters the entire day."