

Voting Rights Lawsuit Dismissed For Navajo Candidate Willie Grayeyes

By ERIK NEUMANN • NOV 12, 2018

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• *Willie Grayeyes on Paiute Mesa near the Navajo Mountain community.*

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The court battle over whether Willie Grayeyes, who appears to have won a seat on the San Juan County Commission, should have been allowed to run for office in Utah has ended, after a federal judge ruled last week to dismiss the case.

On Thursday, November 8th U.S. District Court Judge David Nuffer dismissed the case. That decision further paves the way for [Grayeyes](#), a Democrat, to tip the county commission to become the first Democratic Navajo majority in recent memory. Grayeyes is currently leading in the county commission race over his Republican opponent Kelly Laws by just 95 votes. The deadline for ballots to be counted in the 2018 midterm election is Nov. 20.

In June, Grayeyes [sued San Juan County](#) in U.S. District Court in Utah after he was kicked off the ballot based on allegations that he resided in Arizona rather than Utah. In the lawsuit his attorneys argued that those allegations violated his constitutional rights, specifically his right to vote.

After last week's election, the court case was no longer significant.

"The only thing it was aimed at was putting him on the ballot for the election," said Grayeyes' attorney Steven Boos. "So once that happened the case essentially became moot."

Critics of Grayeyes say the court case to return him to the ballot sidestepped the original question about his residency. Grayeyes is from Navajo Mountain, a community close to the Utah-Arizona border. Limited roads require residents to travel back and forth between the two states.

Blake Hamilton, the attorney representing San Juan County, was not available for comment.

This case in U.S. District Court ultimately focused on a federal issue. Grayeyes' constitutional rights, Boos said and not claims about his residency. The residency issue is a state concern that was previously dismissed from the case.

Nuffer also ruled in favor of Grayeyes' position because of the importance of protecting voting rights, said John Mejia, legal director of the ACLU of Utah.

"Because voting is so fundamental, there should be a high standard to call that into question. And there should be very strong protections," Mejia said.

That includes accusations about an individual's residency and the implications on their ability to vote, he said.