

# Nevada tribes push for satellite polling places

By Scott Sonner, AP

Tribal leaders in Nevada asked a U.S. judge Wednesday to order the state and two counties to establish satellite polling places on reservations where they say Native Americans are being denied an equal opportunity to vote in the November elections.

Two Paiute tribes filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Reno accusing Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske and Washoe and Mineral counties of discriminating by illegally refusing tribe members voting access afforded to people in wealthier, mostly white neighborhoods.

Members of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe living in Washoe County say they must travel 96 miles roundtrip to register to vote or to cast ballots in person in Sparks.

Members of the Walker River Paiute Tribe in rural Mineral County say they have to go 70 miles roundtrip to Hawthorne.

The lawsuit says that's twice as far as voters who live on Lake Tahoe's affluent north shore would have to travel to vote if the county had not set up a satellite poll in upscale Incline Village. As a result, both tribes say their rights are being violated under the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the U.S. and Nevada constitutions.

Voter registrars in the two counties said earlier that there isn't enough time to set up new sites before registration closes Oct. 18 and early voting begins Oct. 22.

The lawsuit seeks temporary and permanent injunctions against the state and the counties. It alleges failure to establish

satellite polls on the reservations has a “significant disparate impact” on the tribes due to socio-economic factors as well as a history of racial discrimination and hostility toward the tribes.

The current practice is an apparent effort to dilute the voting strength of tribe members, according to the suit filed on behalf of the tribes by lawyer Rendal Miller.

Similar legal battles have been waged recently in Utah, Montana and the Dakotas over a variety of issues involving the Voting Rights Acts, including access to polling places as well as unreliable U.S. mail service on reservations.

“If we have the same access and opportunities, we will be able to increase participation by tribal members,” Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Chairman Vinton Hawley said.

Washoe County Registrar Luanne Cutler declined to comment specifically on the suit but said in a statement Wednesday the selection of polling sites began in January based on cost, voting populations and other logistics.

“With Election Day fast-approaching, the registrar’s plan for the general election remains in place and her decision regarding this matter is final,” the statement said.

Neither the secretary of state’s office nor Mineral County immediately responded to requests for comment.