



THE NAVAJO NATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESIDENT BEGAYE SIGNS LEGISLATION REQUIRING THE CHIEF JUSTICE TO HOLD JURIS DOCTOR DEGREE

WINDOW ROCK-Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye signed a resolution this morning that will require the Navajo Nation Supreme Court Chief Justice to hold a Juris Doctor degree.

While Navajo Nation Supreme Court Justices do not reside directly over criminal proceedings, they do hear appeals of criminal proceedings and it is necessary that they be qualified to hear and rule on these types of cases that will come before them.

President Begaye views the legislation as a step in the right direction toward establishing more judicial control over cases involving non-Native Americans.

"In order to position the Nation to try non-Indians in our courts, our judges, especially at the Supreme Court level, need to have a Juris Doctor degree," President Begaye said.

The Nation has every right to enforce both civil and criminal laws on anyone living on, or passing through, Navajo land said President Begaye.

The mission of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court is to "hear cases on appeal and render a final judgement based on law, equity and tradition."

By requiring the Supreme Court Chief Justice to hold a Juris Doctor degree, the Navajo Nation seeks to improve the quality in the administration of justice

and ensure the Nation is able to exercise its sovereignty to the greatest extent allowed under federal law.

President Begaye said he hoped the legislation would have passed 'as is' which included the requirement of all three judges to be state bar licensed. He does, however, see this legislation as progress.

"If we are intent on assuming jurisdiction over any non-Indian on our nation, we have to increase the qualification of our judges both at the Supreme Court and district level," he said. "We are more than capable of doing this ourselves with so many of our Navajo people in law school."

The legislation serves to ensure that only the most qualified people are appointed to the Navajo Nation's highest judicial position. It proposes that individuals with formal legal training will make qualified decisions on the interpretation of the Navajo Nation's laws and their application to disputes brought before the Navajo Nation Supreme Court.

"We do appreciate the passage of this legislation but we want to see more done so that that we can position our judicial system at the proper level of a true nation," President Begaye said.

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