

Loretta A. Tuell



As a little girl, Loretta Tuell would be in class on the Nez Perce Tribe reservation in Lapwai, Idaho and would look outside to see a city (non-reservation) dog catcher gathering and taking dogs that belonged to reservation residents.

This upset her because no one ever tried to find out who owned the dogs or if they had homes on the reservation. Noticing this injustice and trespass on the reservation, Ms. Tuell made it her goal to someday have the ability to correct and prevent this type of occurrence from happening again. She was moved to become a lawyer.

Following college at Washington State University and then graduation from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law, Ms. Tuell began her practice in federal Indian law, ultimately accumulating experience in dealing with national legal and policy issues in Indian country from three different perspectives: Congress, the executive branch, and the private sector. After law school, she served a five-year stint as counsel to Senator Daniel Inouye on the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. President Clinton then first appointed her special assistant and counselor to the assistant secretary-Indian affairs in the U.S. Department of the Interior. In this capacity, she advised the assistant secretary on issues and policies in all programmatic areas of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including gaming and the land-into-trust regulations, and coordinated the legislative agenda for the Bureau. President Clinton later appointed her director of the Office of American Indian Trust, where she advised the secretary and assistant secretary of Indian affairs on decisions, actions, and procedures relating to the department's trust responsibilities affecting American Indian trust assets, international indigenous rights, and trust evaluations for the self-governance tribes.

After government service, Ms. Tuell understood that there was an important role for her in the private sector, as tribal gaming brought substantial economic

benefits to tribal governments for the first time in history. Thus, in 2000, she joined one of the most important Indian law firms in the country, Monteau & Peebles, LLP, and became its first Native American woman partner one year later—one of the very few Native American women to achieve such a position. Her practice focused on federal Indian law, and she represented American Indian tribal government clients before Congress, regulatory agencies, and the courts. For the past eight years, she has served as legal counsel to a nationwide base of American Indian tribes. In 2007, she co-founded AndersonTuell, LLP, which is a 100% Indian-owned law firm. This firm is among the first law firms in Washington, DC with a Native-American woman as a founding partner.

While Ms. Tuell came from humble beginnings and has achieved impressive success as a lawyer, she never forgets her tribal community. Since 1998, she has served on the board of trustees of the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), where she is a mentor and example to Native American youth and, in particular, to young Native American women. In 2008, she was re-elected chair of the board of trustees. She volunteers to help with the National Native American Law Students Association Moot Court Competition, which helps law students prepare for the practice of Indian law and working with tribes. Ms. Tuell frequently speaks at events for rising Native professionals and teaches Indian law to those interested in learning about this area of practice.

Time and again, Native American women lawyers point to Ms. Tuell as their reason for believing that they, too, could go to law school and pursue the practice of law. She has been the role model for countless such women who never thought that such dreams were possible. In addition to encouraging Native American women to reach for a career in law, she always reminds them to give back to their communities. As she has written, "They say it takes a village to raise a child, but where I come from the saying goes, 'It takes a tribe.' ... Our entire culture was built upon this precept, and the secret to my success has been my willingness to embrace this tradition."