

Navajo Nation Supreme Court Associate Justice succumbs to COVID

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 12 March 2021 03:07



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Leaders of the Navajo Nation expressed condolences on the passing of retired Navajo Nation Supreme Court Associate Justice Lorene B. Ferguson, who died March 1 from complications from COVID-19.

“The Navajo Nation mourns the loss of a loving mother and one of the first women justices to serve on the Navajo Nation Supreme Court ... As we recognize National Women’s History Month, we take this opportunity to honor and remember all of Justice Ferguson’s contributions to the Navajo people. There is no doubt that she helped and empowered many throughout her lifetime.” Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said.

According to the Judicial Branch, Ferguson was nominated to serve as Associate Justice by former President Kelsey Begaye in 2001 and later confirmed by the Navajo Nation Council. She served as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court from 2001-2007 and was appointed to serve as Acting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 2004-2005.

Prior to her appointment as Supreme Court Justice, she served as the Navajo Nation Circuit Court Judge starting in 2000, working out of the Kayenta District Court, and as a Navajo Tribal Court Judge, from 1992 to 2000, assigned at different times to the Shiprock, Tohajiilee, Ramah and Alamo Courts. She came to the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch after having served as a Staff Attorney at the Navajo Nation Department of Justice for eight years. While at the Department of Justice, she drafted the first Navajo Election Code and Navajo scholarship policy for the Department of Education, according to a statement by her family.

Navajo Nation Supreme Court Associate Justice succumbs to COVID

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 12 March 2021 03:07

“The Judicial Branch sends condolences to a pivotal member of the Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation. We pay our utmost respect for our nat’áanii as someone who exemplified the best of our Navajo people,” Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne said in a statement from the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch.

“She was a role model for her serious thinking on complex issues and the responsibility she took in being a Supreme Court justice. She was also well-known across Indian Country for her work in the legal field.” Jayne said.

Ferguson graduated from Fort Lewis College in 1965, majoring in English Literature with a minor in Psychology. She worked in the areas of community development, welfare rights and as a Head Start teacher and Indian Education training technician, before attending the University of New Mexico School of Law, where she graduated in 1983.

She served as a mentor to countless law clerks and Navajo attorneys throughout her career. She was a strong advocate for education and traditional law. To her family, her most important and meaningful accomplishments were as wife, mother, grandmother, and matriarch for her family. Her family said that Justice Ferguson would want to encourage every Navajo citizen to stay safe and get vaccinated.

“Our Nation lost a humble, strong, and loving person, but her work for others and the joy that she brought to her family will always be cherished,” Vice President Myron Lizer said.

“My heart goes out to her family, friends, and all of our colleagues within the Judicial Branch. Her contributions will be memorialized in her accomplishments and all that she did to move our Nation forward.” Lizer concluded.