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PRESIDENT SIGNS HISTORIC TRIBAL LAW AND ORDER BILL

Senator Byron Dorgan is legislation's author

WASHINGTON --- President Obama, in a formal White House ceremony Thursday, signed into law historic legislation that will bring major reforms to law enforcement on the nation's Indian reservations. The author of the legislation, Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, attended the ceremony at the President's request and witnessed the signing.

"This new law will save lives in Indian Country," Dorgan said. "It will also dramatically improve the quality of life for millions of Native Americans who have lived far too long with unacceptable levels of violent crime in their communities. Jurisdictional confusion, lack of adequate law enforcement training, and a host of other structural roadblocks to effective law enforcement have created a crisis in law enforcement on many reservations where violent crime rates far exceed the national average. This legislation provides urgently needed help in clearing those roadblocks away."

Enacting the bill has been one of Dorgan's top priorities as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. "The federal government has treaty and trust obligations to ensure public safety for Native Americans and for most of our history, we have failed to meet those obligations," Dorgan said. "This new law will allow us to write a new and much better chapter in the history books regarding law enforcement in Indian communities."

Dorgan said the "broken system of justice" in Indian Country often acts as a magnet for outside criminal groups.

Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND), a member of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, said the crime rate on the nation's reservations is "unacceptably high. Unfortunately, local law enforcement agencies have been without the tools they need to respond appropriately. This bill will bolster law enforcement numbers, better equip police officers and improve the quality of life on reservations thanks in no small part to the leadership of Chairman Dorgan."

The legislation aims to improve all aspects of the justice system on American Indian reservations and clear up jurisdictional confusion among tribal, state and local law enforcement officials, which often gridlocks effective law enforcement in Indian Country.

In North Dakota, the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation suffered 8.6 times the national rate of violence in 2008. At that time, there were only nine police officers patrolling the 2.3 million acre reservation. As a result, victims of violence reported often waiting hours and sometimes even days before receiving a response to their emergency calls.

Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women has reached epidemic levels. The Department of Justice and Centers for Disease Control report that more than one in three American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped in their lifetimes, and two in five will face domestic or partner violence.

Major provisions of the bill include:

- **Evidence Sharing and Declinations:** Federal officials have declined to prosecute more than 50 percent of violent crimes in Indian country, and a higher rate of sexual assaults. The bill will require the Department of Justice to maintain data on criminal declinations and share evidence with tribal justice officials when a case is declined.

- **3-year Tribal Court Sentencing:** Federal law limits tribal court authority to sentence offenders to no more than one year in prison, which limits their ability to provide justice to the victims and the tribal community. The bill establishes an option for tribes to increase sentencing authority for up to three years where a tribe provides added protections to defendants.
- **Deputizing Tribal Police to Enforce Federal Law:** The complex jurisdictional arrangement in Indian Country prevents tribal police from arresting offenders, even when a crime is committed in plain view. The bill will enhance the Special Law Enforcement Commission program, to deputize tribal police officers to enforce federal laws on Indian lands against all offenders.
- **Tribal Police Access to Criminal History Records:** Many tribal police have no access to criminal history records. As a result, when pulling over a suspect, the officer has no background on the person who is detained. The bill will provide tribal police greater access to criminal history databases such as the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).
- **Domestic and Sexual Violence:** The bill will require tribal and federal officers serving Indian country to receive specialized training to interview victims of sexual assault and collect crime scene evidence. It also requires Indian Health Service facilities to implement consistent sexual assault protocols, and requires federal officials to provide documents and testimony gained in the course of their federal duties to aid in prosecutions before tribal courts.
- **Programs to Improve Justice Systems and Prevent Crime:** The bill reauthorizes and improves programs designed to strengthen tribal court systems, tribal police departments, and tribal corrections programs. It also updates laws to address high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, and programs to improve opportunities for at risk youth on Indian lands.