



MARY PAVEL '92 WASHINGTON, D.C.

# A Law Degree in Action

Growing up as a member of the Skokomish Tribe in Shelton, Washington, Mary Pavel '92 knew at an early age she wanted to give back to her community.

Pavel's parents encouraged her and her five older siblings to pursue a university education. Her mother was a nurse and the reservations local medical leader and she paved the way for legal action within the tribe.

"From a very early age, my mom helped build my tribe's governmental institutions, beginning in 1963, when she was the tribe's first judge to handle matters and hold court hearings."

For her undergraduate work, Pavel attended Dartmouth College and majored in sociology. She then spent a year as a paralegal at Sonosky, Chambers, Sachse, Endreson & Perry, LLP, a national law firm devoted to representing Native American interests, before starting law school at the UW.

"Having the opportunity to work at the firm as a paralegal was a terrific way to begin my legal career," she said. "I was able to see that practicing law is really a team sport and that it takes all team members whether they are the Partner-in-Charge or the secretary doing the edits to create a terrific work product that the firm can stand behind."

From trial and appellate litigation, to land regulation and hunting and fishing rights, Sonosky, Chambers, Sachse, Endreson & Perry, LLP is considered the cutting-edge firm specializing in the field of Native American law.

Pavel returned to the firm each summer during law school and upon graduating became an associate. In 1999, she became a partner at the firm, making her one of the first female Indian partners at a national law firm. She said she feels lucky and is humbled by this honor.

"There are Indian women everywhere in America doing amazing and very difficult things in very difficult situations who are working to make their communities better. Getting to go to work in an office every day is easy compared to that," she said.

While most lawyers do not stay at the same firm for their entire career, Pavel said she is content with working at the Sonosky. She is passionate about advocating for Native American rights and the firm provides her with the perfect platform to do so.

"I could never look a tribal leader in the face and say 'geez, I'm sorry there's nothing I can do,'" Pavel said. "It's too close to my heart. I must be an advocate."

Within the firm, she leads projects on appropriations matters, where she has successfully worked with the tribal clients to secure literally hundreds of millions in funding for vitally needed projects such as community roads, schools and hospitals.

Pavel also works on a number of national initiatives including amendments to the Federal Unemployment Tax Act, which secured tribes parity to be treated as governments.

"Tribal government's status' as a government should be fully recognized and embraced," she said.

Pavel has also had the opportunity to work on some of the largest tribal settlements that Congress has enacted, including the Colville Tribes' Grand Coulee Dam Settlement Act and the Pueblo of Isleta Settlement and Natural Resources Restoration Act. In addition, Pavel was the lead

lobbyist on the Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System Act, which authorized the construction and operation of a \$193 million domestic water system to provide safe drinking water to the 30,000 residents of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation and surrounding communities. The facility will come online this year, supplying a large portion of the Reservation with drinkable water for the first time.

"That's probably my greatest professional accomplishment," she said.

Reid Chambers is one of Pavel's partners at the firm. He said Pavel is heavily involved in representing tribes before Congress on legislation and before federal executive agencies. She is widely regarded by tribes and by her peers as one of the foremost legislative and government relations specialists on Indian issues in Washington D.C.

"Pavel is a uniquely qualified and passionately committed advocate for Indian tribes and tribal organizations," he said. "She is a wonderful credit to the late Prof. Ralph Johnson who trained her in Indian law and to the splendid mentoring she received at our firm both by the late Marvin Sonosky and by Douglas Endreson, both top practitioners of Indian law."

In addition to her work at the firm, Pavel is also the founding President of the Native American Bar Association of Washington, D.C. and a founding member of the Northwest Indian Bar Association. Pavel said the inspiration for starting the Native American Bar Association of Washington, D.C. came from her peers.

"I am so proud to know the many native attorneys and non-natives working on behalf of Tribes and Indian people here in D.C. I remember thinking that we should all get to know one another," she said.

Yet, even with her demanding schedule, Pavel returns home to Washington State regularly.

"I am always so happy to be home, I always say the only thing wrong with Washington, D.C. is that it is not home," she said. "But thankfully, the non-stop flights have me home in five hours."