



THE TOP 100 ATTORNEYS

FEATURING BRIAN LEWIS, ESQ.

Celebrating
our 15th
Year of
Publishing



BRIAN LEWIS, ESQ.

**PARTNER WITH THE
TRIBAL NATIONS
PRACTICE GROUP
OF DRUMMOND
WOODSUM.**

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BRIAN LEWIS, ESQ.

Few people can claim that they are contributing to the advancement of American Indians in their practice of the law, and fewer still are those who have made quantifiable progress. Add to this the statistic that the number of attorneys in the United States who are members of tribes constitute a mere half of one percent (.05%) of all attorneys in the nation, and you have a short list, at the top of which is Brian Lewis, Esq.

Brian is a member of the Choctaw Nation, and he's been contributing to American Indian economic development since he became an attorney. Brian calls it "the reason for becoming a lawyer and his passion."

If you're looking at his CV, you'll find impressive highlights such as Brian's expertise in federal Indian law, Navajo Nation law, and energy, as well as his service to the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and Office of the Attorney General. Brian acted as lead attorney for the team that created the Navajo Transitional Energy Company, the third-largest coal producer in North America and the largest American Indian-owned energy company in the world, which takes profits from coal sales and invests them in renewable energy resources. He was also lead counsel in *Navajo Nation v. Urban Outfitters* until his last day with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and prevailed in numerous other federal and Navajo Nation Supreme Court cases.

My practice also focuses on property law, leasing, and land use. I draft and negotiate agreements for the creation of joint ventures, site control and land use agreements, and the finance instruments necessary for funding projects in Indian Country.

From 2015 until 2021, Brian owned and operated Brian Lewis Legal LLC, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he represented Navajo Nation commercial enterprises, large corporations, and utilities. At the close of Q3, 2021, he accepted an equity partnership with Drummond Woodsum in their Tribal Nations Practice Group, where he is one of four American Indian partners.

We spoke with Brian to learn about his career, his many achievements, and how he's improving economic development in Indian Country with his practice.

Brian, you had a successful practice of your own. What attracted you to Drummond Woodsum?

I wanted to have more of a national reach than just the Southwest and to increase my bandwidth by practicing with competent, experienced professionals. Drummond Woodsum's Tribal Nations Practice Group provides both of those things and many other professional advantages. I'm Choctaw and my wife and children are members of the Navajo Nation, so I wanted to be able to continue

performing work to enhance economic development in the Navajo Nation while also serving my own people and other tribes across the United States. My new role at Drummond Woodsum allows me to represent a wider swath of tribes, and at the national level. I also get the privilege of working with colleagues I respect greatly in a national Indian law practice. Drummond has had a strong nation-wide Indian law practice for many years. As well, because the firm allows me to maintain affordable rates, it's more cost-effective for tribes and tribal enterprises to get the benefits of a corporate firm that provides comprehensive legal services. That last point was a big plus for me, because I'm keen on providing tribes, tribal enterprises, and companies that transact business in Indian Country maximum value.



Tell us a little bit about your work with Drummond Woodsum's Tribal Nations Practice Group.

As a partner with the Tribal Nations Practice Group, my work revolves around economic development. Primarily, I represent tribes and tribal commercial instrumentalities. But I also represent private, American Indian-owned businesses and large non-Indian corporate interests that have projects and operations in Indian Country, which ultimately contribute to improved standards of living in Indian Country. A great deal of my practice is in energy, concerning both conventional and renewable resources. My practice is both transactional and litigation. On the transactional side, I handle all aspects of projects or developments and commercial operations in Indian Country. On the litigation side, I primarily handle

law-heavy dispositive motions—such as motions to dismiss pursuant to Rules 12(b) (1) and 19—at the trial level and appellate matters.

You have specialized expertise in federal Indian law, Navajo Nation law, and energy. Will you tell us a little about your work in these areas?

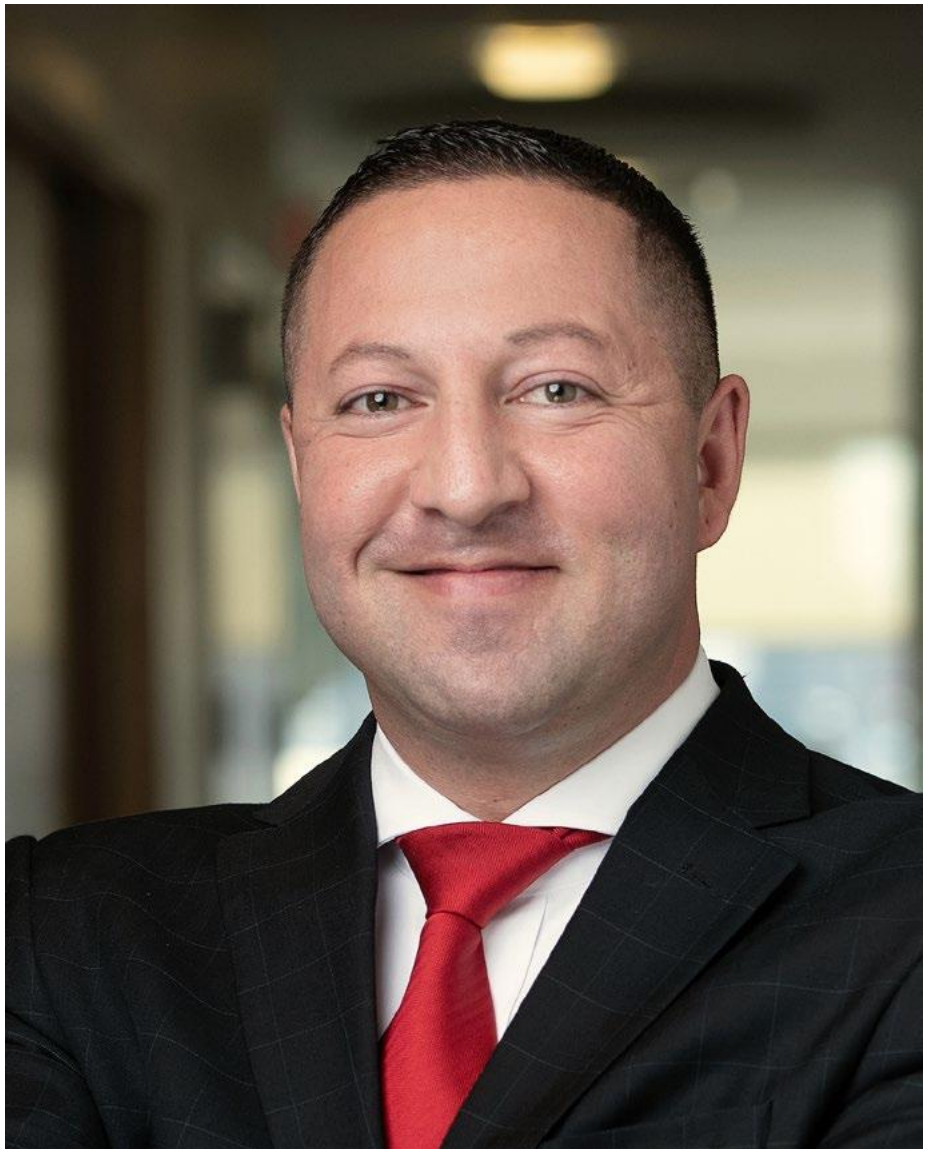
All of my work falls under the umbrella of economic development in Indian Country. I've litigated at the trial and appellate levels — including, namely, jurisdictional issues, the propriety of permitting and regulatory approvals, and hot button issues, such as whether a state has the authority to impose and collect taxes and if the state can enforce statutory laws and regulations in Indian Country. My practice also focuses on property law, leasing, and land use. I draft and negotiate agreements for the creation of joint ventures, site control and land use agreements, and the finance instruments necessary for funding projects in Indian Country.

What compelled you to devote your entire career to representing American Indian clients?

I received a tribal scholarship in my first year of college and I wondered how the Choctaw Nation generated the funds I had received. I learned that most educational awards came from gaming proceeds, and while the tribal leaders had made the decisions that allowed me to receive such funding, it was attorneys who had effectively pursued and implemented those decisions. I knew then that I wanted to help others, and that I could do so by becoming an attorney and focusing my practice on tribal economic development.

What do you enjoy most about your work, Brian?

It's the satisfaction that comes with improving the lives of American Indians. Native Americans live in the poorest areas, have the highest unemployment rates, the worst healthcare, and the least opportunity of anyone else in this country. Knowing that my work leads to better standards of living and seeing people in Indian Country have greater opportunity and ability to flourish is the ultimate reward. It's why I do what I do.



Equity Partner



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