



NOOKSACK TRIBE CELEBRATES SUPREME COURT RULING ON INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 15, 2023 – In an important move today, the Supreme Court upheld the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA). This act was put into place to keep Native American cultures and traditions intact for children when they have been removed from their homes and have entered the foster care system.

The threat posed by this case was a direct assault on tribal sovereignty and self-determination. The Cherokee Nation and Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, worked tirelessly to fight this case. “We thank the Supreme Court for upholding ICWA, for honoring tribal treaty rights and for leaving the decision of Native children’s care where it belongs – with the tribes. We will continue to fight for and protect our future generations. We stand tall today with all tribes across the nation. Our hands are lifted to the Supreme Court Justices, the Cherokee Nation and Deb Haaland who all understand how important protecting tribal sovereignty is,” said Nooksack Chair RoseMary LaClair.

Justice Amy Barrett delivered the opinion of the Court. She said, “This case is about children who are among the most vulnerable: those in the child welfare system. In the usual course, state courts apply state law when placing children in foster or adoptive homes. But when the child is an Indian, a federal statute—the Indian Child Welfare Act—governs. Among other things, this law requires a state court to place an Indian child with an Indian caretaker, if one is available.”

Supreme Court Justices Thomas and Alito were the two dissenting voices on this case. Details about this case, including the opinions of the Court, can be found at supremecourt.gov.

About the Nooksack Indian Tribe

The Nooksack Indian Tribe is a federally recognized tribe, part of the Point Elliott Treaty of 1855, and today is based on their ancestral homeland of Whatcom County. They are Coast Salish people who lived, fished, hunted, and gathered for untold generations in their historic traditional lands from the base of Mt. Baker to the saltwater at Bellingham Bay. They extended into Skagit County to the south and British Columbia to the north. Their territory included a primary Nooksack area, not open to free use by members of other groups, and joint-use areas, which were shared. Today there are approximately 2,000 enrolled tribal members. The Nooksack reservation is in the town of Deming, WA with tribal land extending from Lynden to the South Fork Valley.