

# 2016 Hot List: Indian Law Practitioners

BY SUZETTE BREWER

Tribal rights have too often been a matter of “wrongs” when dealing with broken treaties and a hostile or at best indifferent federal government. That’s why a great lawyer is any tribe’s best friend, and counsel.



Kaplan, pushing into new territory as they represent tribal clients, including the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, who recently sued the Indian Health Service for closing down the only emergency room on its reservation in South Dakota, as well as successfully representing Oglala Sioux tribal member Alex White Plume in his industrial hemp case.

“When we were prosecutors, we used to talk among ourselves about what we would do differently if we were representing the tribes, so this new division at Robins Kaplan

## The Wing-Men

When Tim Purdon and Brendan Johnson left the U.S. Attorney’s office in North Dakota and South Dakota, respectively, to create the American Indian law division at the national firm of **Robins Kaplan LLP** in 2015, it caused a minor earthquake in the Indian law community. Many wondered how the Feds would fill these enormous gaps, who would match their many accomplishments. In just under five years as federal prosecutors, they made the radical decision to shift away from decades of friction with the tribes to forge a more collaborative approach to improving public safety on Indian reservations in the Dakotas.

In the last year, the two close friends—known as the “Dakota Boys”—have translated that approach to develop the American Indian law division at Robins

is an extension of that,” says Purdon. “We wanted to build this new division as partners and teammates and the firm has been very supportive of our work. We hope to rewrite the odds for tribes in both high-stakes litigation, as well as pro bono cases.”