Federal jury finds Shiprock woman guilty on assault charges; faces a decade behind bars

Written by gallupsun
Tuesday, 13 December 2016 00:33

ALBUQUERQUE – A federal jury sitting in Santa Fe, N.M., returned a verdict Dec. 12 finding Cornelia Tom Tapaha, 40, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation who resides in Shiprock, N.M., guilty on assault charges after a six-day trial. The verdict was announced by U.S. Attorney Damon P. Martinez, Special Agent in Charge Terry Wade of the FBI's Albuquerque Division, and Director Jesse Delmar of the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety.

Tapaha was arrested in June 2016, on an indictment charging her with assault with a dangerous weapon, a vehicle, and assault resulting in serious bodily injury. The indictment alleged that Tapaha committed the crimes on July 8, 2015, on the Navajo Indian Reservation in San Juan County, N.M.

Trial of Tapaha began on Dec. 5, 2016, and concluded this afternoon when the jury returned a verdict finding Tapaha guilty of assault and assault resulting in serious bodily injury.

The evidence at trial established that on the evening of July 8, 2016, Tapaha, the victim and another individual consumed alcohol while driving on the Navajo Indian Reservation. While Tapaha was driving and the victim was in the front passenger seat, Tapaha and the victim began arguing. Eventually Tapaha pulled over, and the victim and the other individual got out of the vehicle and began walking away. Tapaha remained in the vehicle and proceeded to run over the victim. As a result of this assault, the victim's ribs, collar bone and ankle were broken and required surgical repair. The victim also suffered multiple lacerations requiring stitches.

At sentencing, Tapaha faces a statutory maximum penalty of ten years in federal prison. A sentencing hearing has yet to be scheduled.

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 This case was investigated by the Farmington office of the FBI and the Shiprock office of the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joseph Spindle and Novaline D. Wilson are prosecuting the case.