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It may be precedent: husband, wife on bench

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Bloomington, Ind. — Sheldon Jay Plager and Irene H. Nagel may represent U.S. judicial history as the first married couple to serve in the federal judiciary at the appellate level.

Plager, an Indiana University law school professor, was sworn in as a member of the U.S. Court of Appeals on Saturday night. Nagel has served as a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission since 1985.

Plager said he's been told he and his wife are establishing a judicial first, but he hasn't conducted his own research.

Given how recently it has been that women have moved into the higher levels of government, "I suspect it's true," he said.

"I think that we are," added Nagel. "It's kind of fun, both of us being from the IU Law School faculty."

Plager was nominated for the judgeship by President Bush this summer. The U.S. Senate confirmed his appointment Wednesday before recessing, and President Bush signed it Friday. U.S. District Judge Sarah Evans Barker, a close friend, swore Plager in Saturday night in a private ceremony at his home.

Plager, 58, came from the University of Illinois in 1977 and was dean of the IU Law School until 1984.

Since then, he has remained on the faculty part time, teaching courses in his specialties of environmental, property and administrative law.

Nagel has been on the law school faculty since 1973, teaching various courses in criminal law. She has taught part time since her federal appointment.

"Our plan is to live in the Washington area, and both of us hope to continue to teach part time at the IU Law School," he said, noting that is "not uncommon" to find judges who are former law school professors.