

The Annual Siletz Pow-Wow, initiated in the early 1970's, has grown to a popular and well-attended cultural event, drawing hundreds of Indian participants from the Pacific Northwest and other areas of the country.

And finally, the tribe's annual Cultural Camp is characterized by the attendance of family groups who attend workshops on tanning, basketweaving and other everyday practices that helped their ancestors to maintain a strong and secure presence in their aboriginal homelands.

POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Ladies and gentlemen, I now want to address the delicate issue of tribal political dynamics. It is no secret among the membership that the tribal council is emerging from an internal political upheaval that has been costly in both money and time of the council.

This political struggle needs to be examined within a broader context so that it is understood that these episodes occur under *all* representative forms of government.

Let us explore a bit of history together and recall that the so-called founding fathers of the United States, who had fled a monarchy in England, were determined to establish a democracy in which the sovereignty resided in the people rather than the crown. Under this concept, "we the people," so to speak, would share their sovereignty with elected officials to carry out governmental functions.

Moreover, the founding fathers envisioned a tripartite form of government, consisting of a legislative branch, judicial branch and an executive branch to insure a system of "checks and balances" to preclude domination of public affairs by one branch or another. While this radical experiment in democracy insured citizen participation, it also invited controversy and disputes within and between the three branches.

And if you don't believe there are political disputes and upheaval in, let's say the legislative branch, I invite you to watch the C-Span Channel during a debate over a controversial issue or bill in the House or Senate.

But the system most always leads to a resolution based on compromise, and an adherence to the ground rules in the legislative body.

What does all of this have to do with tribal governments? As federal Indian policy evolved in the government's dealings with tribes, a legislative act in 1934 encouraged tribes to abandon traditional practices of selecting leaders for their governing systems in favor of the so-called representative form of government.

Thus, the vast majority of federally-recognized tribes today operate under elected representative forms of government. And while

the electorate on reservations is not divided along political party lines (Democratic and Republican), political factionalism is clearly in play, often based on familial and other coalition lines.

Tribal candidates seeking political offices do so in an arena characterized by issues, ideology, personalities, and other factors that affect political campaigns.

Therefore, it is not unusual for tribal governments, on occasion, to find themselves faced with political crisis that must be resolved by reasonable people and within the confines of the tribe's constitution.

Rarely does the federal trustee, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, inject itself in such disputes because these are internal tribal matters best worked out by the members and elected officials, but within its governing documents. I believe this is sound public policy, given that self-determination is the cornerstone of prevailing federal Indian policy.

Majority and minority tribal political factions are challenged to resolve these political upheavals, and carry an obligation to do so to protect tribal sovereignty, maintain governmental credibility and protect the best interests of the membership.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that the Siletz Tribal Council has successfully weathered the most recent political struggle, that a resolution has been crafted in keeping with the tribal constitution and that the best interests of the membership have been maintained.

RESTORATION LEGISLATION

We have moved quickly through the 21-year journey since the initial Restoration Day. But the presence of Senator Hatfield here with us reminds me that the enactment of his legislation to restore federal recognition to the Siletz Tribe was *not* a foregone conclusion. That legislation was subjected to all of the intricacies and dynamics of the legislative process.

You will recall that the prospect of the Siletz tribal members exercising hunting and fishing rights generated strong opposition from the State of Oregon. This issue could have stalled, if not completely derailed, the enactment of this critical legislation. But the Siletz Tribe waived their inherent rights - a painful decision that enabled them to achieve their broader goal: restoration as a federally-recognized tribe.

Although other issues emerged that impacted the legislation, none were as prospectively damaging as the hunting and fishing issue. Time will not permit a lengthy discourse on the entire legislative process, but we all recognize, I am certain, just how important Senator Hatfield's sponsorship was in this process.

Senator Hatfield's leadership position on the Senate Committee on Interior & Insular Affairs put him in position to guide the movement of the legislation. The Senate ultimately passed Senator Hatfield's legislation and it was referred to the House of Representatives where that body worked its will and passed the legislation. Finally, it was referred to President Carter who signed it on November 18, 1977.

As a professional staff member on the Senate Committee on Interior & Insular Affairs, I cannot emphasize too strongly how vital the Senator's unwavering support and commitment was to the eventual enactment of Public Law 95-195, the Siletz Indian Tribe Restoration Act.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the Siletz Tribe's journey from the "A-Frame" to the "website" is one marked by tribal participation, hard work, determination and a recognition that the best interests of the membership must always remain paramount.

It is also marked by the tribe's philosophic belief that it is possible for the members to function and contribute in today's complex society by balancing the strength of cultural attributes with the very real need for realistic economic development to sustain the people's livelihood.

In summary I submit that following restoration, the Siletz Tribe has functioned as a credible sovereign; managed its governmental grants and contracts legally and effectively; maintained a "good neighbor" policy toward the broader community; and based its decision-making always on the premise of what is in the best interests of the Siletz Indian people.

There can be no doubt that the tribe has indeed completed the journey from the A-Frame to the website. We don't know where the website will lead us, but we know the journey has just begun.....

Forrest J. Gerard



ADDRESS CORRECTION

If your address has changed, please contact the Newsletter Office by calling
1-800-922-1399, ext. 291

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Please leave a message with the new address, and whether you are a Siletz Tribal Member or not.