

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Chairman Delores Pigsley

The Tribal Council recently authorized a comprehensive restructuring and upgrading of the tribe's court system. The Council's goal is to establish a system that is more responsive to the growing complexities of legal matters coming before the court. At the same time, the Council hopes to make the court more user friendly for individual tribal members.

As part of the system upgrade, the Council recently named judges to fill all vacancies within the court system. The Council established high qualifying standards, including requirements that

all candidates be graduates of accredited law schools and be members in good standing of at least one federal, state or tribal bar association. The Council also conducted comprehensive interviews. Despite the high standards, many top-quality candidates applied and the Council filled all vacancies with well-qualified individuals.

The Council named Calvin Gantenbein as the chief judge to replace John Roe. Judge Gantenbein has served in the tribe's court system in a number of capacities and brings experience and knowledge to his position. In addition to the chief judge, the Council named Mark Williams, Gaming Court associate judge; Cathern Tufts, George Stevenson and Robert Dickinson, Appellate Court associate judges; Edmund Goodman and George Stevenson, District Court associate judges; and Arthur Fisher as Community Court associate judge.

The new judges soon will undertake a comprehensive training program to learn the Siletz Tribal Court structure, tribal laws and rules of procedure. Each judge is expected to become an expert on tribal laws and procedures. As part of the training, the judges will be asked to identify areas within the court structure or in the tribe's laws and procedures where they think

changes would improve the system. The Council believes that this process will result in a better understanding by the judges of the tribe's system and help reach the objective of a better, more responsive court.

In addition to the judges' training, the Council has directed a number of changes to existing laws and additions to the tribe's body of law. All tribal members will have an opportunity to participate in this process. A principal objective of this effort will be developing a Peacemakers Court to provide a simple system of dispute resolution for tribal members that will not require use of the entire court system. A second major goal will be to establish an administrative procedure to address grievances of tribal members and employees in a simple, uniform and fair manner.

The Council recognizes that this effort will require considerable effort and expense. Fortunately, the tribe has received a number of grants that will pay for the project, including a major grant from the Administration for Native Americans. With the availability of funding, the Council decided it must take the opportunity now to undertake this necessary step to ensure that the Siletz Tribal Court system is prepared to meet its obligations in the next century.

To the editor:

First, I would like to respond to the letters I read by Gilbert Towner and Darcy M. Jones in the November issue of the newsletter.

It stated in these letters that the tribal elders do not want to support the Lower Rogue River Tribes getting federal recognition, so the Big Bend run was rerouted this year.

I have a lot of respect for elders and listen to their words carefully. But on this occasion, I am of the opinion that they are wrong. We are taught to respect our elders, but we are also taught that if we don't stand as one, we fall apart as many.

We as Indians have faced one of the most horrific genocides in the history of the world. How can we tell our brothers and sisters that they don't have a right

to exist as a people in the eyes of our racist government? We should stand together as one and help these people. They are our allies, not our enemies.

We must also stand as one for another people, the traditional Navajo in the Big Mountain/Black Mesa area.

The traditional Navajo in this area are slated again to be forcibly removed from their lands so Peabody Coal can strip mine the area and make a few more bucks. (I'm sure we all remember some of the many "Trails of Tears" the United States government has sent us on.) They have been trying since around 1926 to get the traditional Navajo off their land, and seriously violating their human rights since the early '70s.

We must stand together as one to stop this. Bill Clinton graciously

inconvenienced a game of golf to sign the forced relocation bill, slated for Feb. 1, 2000.

One has to ask, once the U.S. government finishes these people off, who will they come for next? Will it be our traditional peoples? Will it be traditional peoples from other Indian nations? Will it be traditional peoples from other nationalities?

I've read my history. I know the U.S. government doesn't stop at just one. We have to stand as one, or fall as many.

For more information, contact the Indigenous Support Coalition of Oregon, PO Box 11715, Eugene, OR 97440, 541-683-2789, e-mail: isco@efn.org.

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