

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Many important tribal activities took place during the past month that I could report on. I will, however, devote this report to two items on the national scene that have important direct implications on the future of the Siletz Tribe. They involve the BIA's budget process and the appointment of Gale Norton as secretary of the Interior.

BIA Budget and Process

On Feb. 28, a meeting of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Budget Advisory Council was convened in Washington, D.C., to discuss the bureau's budget for FY2002 and budget issues for its FY2003 budget formulation.

I, along with Chairperson Colleen Cawston of the Colville Tribe, was appointed by Northwest Regional Director Stan Speaks to represent the Northwest at this important national meeting of the BIA budget. This was part of an ongoing process started during FY2000 with the formation of the BIA/Tribal Budget Advisory Council.

Deliberations by the advisory council last December led to establishing the National Budget Strategic Panel to assist the bureau in putting together its budget for the next fiscal year, FY2002.

The strategic panel reached consensus in early February that "the direct involvement of tribal governments in the budget development process will result in a better-documented and stronger BIA budget submission that more accurately addresses the needs of American Indians and Alaskan Natives."

In mid-February, the strategic panel defined certain guiding principles, among them:

- Budget priorities should focus on strengthening tribal government capacity to serve their communities.
- Gaming revenue is not the panacea for all tribes.
- Most tribes don't have a revenue tax base like state and local governments do.



Chairman Delores Pigsley

- Budget priorities should emphasize self-reliance and economic development initiatives.

The meeting on Feb. 28, which Cawston and I attended, was therefore a follow-up to those earlier council meetings. Current tribal involvement in the bureau's budget process reflects the fact that in prior years (in the words of the strategic panel), the "BIA/Tribal National Budget have not provided for adequate dialogue between federal and tribal officials."

Regional budget meetings are now taking place and the FY2003 National Budget Hearing is scheduled for May 9-10 in Washington, D.C., which I also plan to attend. According to Speaks, the FY2003 budget formulation process will concentrate on completing tribal unmet needs with supporting justifications.

In preparation for that national meeting, a March 19 meeting of the Portland region was held, attended by Northwest tribes including Siletz representatives.

In the meantime, it was announced at the Feb. 28 meeting that the FY2002 budget would "provide reasonable spending increases to meet tribal needs." Overall, the approved budget is for \$1.9 billion, a 5.5 percent increase over FY2001.

Although the actual figures may not be available until after publication of this issue of Siletz News, we were

informed that while the Department of Interior took a 4 percent cut, the BIA budget for FY2002 received an increase over FY2001. It appears that education, law enforcement, and trust services are high priorities in the FY2002 budget. Tribes were urged to unify their thoughts and convey their recommendation in their testimonies.

The Indian Health Service of the Department of Health and Human Services is pursuing a similar budget path. The Siletz Tribe also is actively involved in this process.

Norton Airs Opinions on Indian Issues

Since the March issue of Siletz News was published, President George W. Bush appointed Gale Norton as secretary of the Interior. The U.S. Congress confirmed her appointment after some controversy.

Because the secretary of the Interior administers the Bureau of Indian Affairs, I think it's important for you to know what Norton's opinions are regarding various Indian issues.

Her testimony in late February before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, chaired by Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, gives us some clues about how Norton views basic Indian issues and her responsibility in addressing them. I have taken the liberty of quoting from relevant portions of her testimony, in which she states in part:

"The mission of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is to enhance the quality of life of American Indians and Alaska Natives, to promote economic opportunity, and to protect the management and trust assets of Indian tribes, individual Indians and Alaska Natives ..."

"President Bush and I ... want to make advances in self-determination and self-governance during our tenure, which we believe can be fostered through consultation and our mutual goal of better government ..."

"I take very seriously my responsibility as the trustee for Indian lands, trust moneys, and federal obligations to the tribes under treaties and laws ..."

Then, pointing out that she is no novice in dealing with critical Indian issues, Norton referred to her role as Colorado attorney general from 1991 to 1999, stating:

"I had the privilege to negotiate personally two of the first Indian gaming compacts, between the Southern Ute and the Ute Mountain Ute tribes and the state of Colorado ..."

"My office played a large role in the ongoing negotiations over the scope and funding of the Animus-LaPlata project in Colorado ... (which) helped me understand better the needs of the tribes, state, and federal authorities and to assist in resolving economic, environmental, and political issues."

"I also handled issues relating to oil and gas development on and near Colorado's Indian reservations, and understand the challenges associated with both conservation and development of trust lands."

It is clear from Norton's testimony that she shares President Bush's commitment to education. She spoke at some length about the need to improve Indian education and school facilities. She said, "It will be my responsibility to help see that no Indian child is left behind ..."

Norton commented that she has heard concerns expressed about a wide range of Indian issues and concluded her testimony by stating:

"We will meet these challenges openly and will seek your guidance in these important issues. It is my heartfelt desire that this Committee and I begin and continue a process of consultation, cooperation, and communication that will strengthen tribal governments, help Indian people, and improve the education of America's Indian youth."

It is encouraging to hear this newly appointed secretary not only express her commitment to developing human and natural resources of Indian tribes, but also to Indian self-determination and perhaps most importantly, "the strengthening of tribal governments."

Hopefully, she will be able to translate her commitment to action.

