

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the editor:

Tribal members will soon be asked to vote on the question whether the tribal Constitution should be changed to prohibit tribal employees from serving on the Tribal Council. Before answering that question, each tribal member should ask whether any justification exists to ban any segment of the tribal population from participating in this important part of tribal self-government.

Should our Constitution be amended to say that some tribal members have fewer rights than others? Should tribal members, in order to bring their skills and dedication to tribal employment, be forced to forsake the privilege of seeking the support of their fellow tribal members in open elections to fill council seats?

Those who would force all tribal employees to give up this right cite two principal reasons for their position. They maintain that tribal employees are too conflicted to serve properly on council. They also hold that tribal employees do not have time to fill both roles properly.

While these are valid concerns, an amendment to the tribal Constitution is a radical and unnecessary overreaction to any problem that may exist. The Constitution should not be modified to establish blanket prohibitions to bar participation in government when less radical and equally efficient means already exist or are available to remedy any problem that may occur.

We, as tribal members, have the ultimate means to determine whether any member shall serve on the council because we have the right to vote. No situation exists at present that justifies taking the right of choice in the voting booth away from our membership. In fact, if tribal voters have a broader base of candidates to choose from, voting rights will be more powerful.

If the Constitution is amended, many of our best and brightest members will be forced to give up their political right in order to feed their families. That is not fair and it is not in the best interests of the tribe.

If our most capable members are eligible to run for office, the incentive for the incumbent council to perform in the best interest of the tribe will be increased. And, if any council member fails to perform, the membership always can vote them out.

Respectfully yours,
Bonnie Petersen

To the editor:

I'm writing to express my strong opposition to allowing tribal employees to be on Tribal Council.

Even though the judge ruled that the ordinances prohibiting it are unconstitutional, I believe the judge didn't make a good decision.

I believe the early councils knew how important it was to keep Tribal Council separate from tribal employees. If employees are allowed at the same time to serve on council, it will create all sorts of headaches for supervisors who are bound to have trouble supervising employees who happen to be council members. How can they tell a councilperson they cannot attend a council meeting when they need them to be on the job as an employee.

Just from reading *Siletz News*, I know how much time council members must spend on official council business.

To the editor:

I have read with interest the recent letters regarding employees now having the legal right under Siletz law to serve on the Tribal Council. I would like to make a couple of comments.

One of the questions that is out there is can a person who has a full-time job effectively serve on the Tribal Council. It's being said that being a Tribal Council member is almost a full-time job.

What is surprising to me is that the Tribal Council does not seem to manage their time very well. Why are two or three or more of these meetings not consolidated into a single day? Is it because council members receive travel time, mileage, and per diem for every meeting?

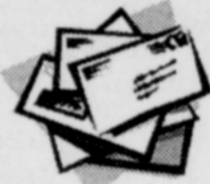
Why should the entire council attend all local and national meetings? It used to be that the tribe would send a delegate and alternate to represent the tribe and these representatives would come back and report to the council. I think the Tribal Council could greatly reduce the cost of conducting council business by managing their time more efficiently.

The council could also delegate a lot of the workload it reserves for itself by not being "the board of everything." It appears that some of the council want to create the illusion of a full-time Tribal Council, either to further argue that they deserve a pay increase or to make it appear

It isn't like it was in days gone by. As for tribal employees, they must put in 40 hours a week on their jobs. I don't see how they can do both.

It's something else if a tribal member is employed by a private employer outside of the tribe. Then, it's up to the employer to allow as much time as necessary to be away from his or her job. I actually don't believe any employer would allow an employee to be away from their job as much as is required for a councilperson to do their job.

For over 20 years, our Tribal Councils have accomplished a lot of wonderful things for the tribe. The evidence is everywhere. And they were accomplished without tribal employees sitting on council. At the same time, our tribal employees have done a wonderful job - by paying attention to their own duties.



that anyone who is employed could not effectively serve on the Tribal Council.

I think what is really going on here is that some of the Tribal Council members are afraid, and I believe with good reason, that now that tribal employees can serve on the council, they will be facing some tough, competent candidates in future elections. I believe that tribal employees will serve as effectively on the council as other tribal members employed elsewhere have and currently are. I think that any tribal member who is willing to spend their time serving on the Tribal Council should be applauded.

Barring any segment of the membership from service only denies us a wider range of candidates to choose from. Time commitment is an important part of serving on the council. But the notion that tribal members cannot be employed and serve effectively is a fabrication.

Read your council members' time sheets. Look at the hours the entire council spends attending national or even regional meetings where one delegate and an alternate could easily do the job. We need to go back to the structure we once had, where the Tribal Council oversees all aspects of tribal government, instead of trying to function as the "board of everything."

Sincerely,
Kristi Martin

It's true it would be good if we can get dedicated young tribal members on council. But allowing tribal employees to sit on council doesn't solve a thing; it just opens a whole can of disagreeable worms.

The Tribal Council has given us, the general membership, the chance to decide. I'm going to vote against allowing tribal employees to be on council and I hope, for the sake of the future of the tribe, others will also vote against it.

The coming constitutional election is very important. I have a concern about the elections process that I hope will be corrected before that election. It has to do with the last election when my mother was asked three times for her registration card because they said her signatures didn't match. Her ballot was finally accepted, but she was told there were 31 others that weren't accepted, perhaps for the same reason.

I know the Election Board has a difficult job and tries to be accurate and fair. But when every vote counts, we can't afford any glitches that disqualify votes. And her vote and every vote must count!

Sincerely,
Debbie Hanks



To the editor:

I was very surprised when the vote for a raise for our council members was defeated. What do you expect from them? You don't want to pay them a livable wage, so I guess the only ones on council will have to be on welfare, retired on Social Security, or independently wealthy.

They don't have 9-5, five-day work schedules. I know some who are answering calls at 9 or 10 p.m.

If we want to keep qualified members on council, we better let them or pay them a livable wage.

Sincerely,
Wanda Melton

**Please see more
letters on pages
2, 4, and 6.**