

TRIBAL PROGRAM NEWS

Restoration, con't from page 1

ory to him and are absolutely unable to function in his present world."

The words seem ludicrous now, especially when you consider that six decades later, tribal people still remember their culture and have rebounded to create their own society within the dominant-culture society.

Termination as a federal policy began to be implemented in the 1950s.

Siletz Tribal land holdings were sold by the federal government and other tribal properties, including the cemetery, were transferred to the town of Siletz because the tribe could not pay the property taxes that were now due.

Ironically, a Congressional Report on Indian Affairs in 1949 warned that tribal leaders might never forget the establishment of such a cruel and unusual policy toward their people. "The termination policy adopted by the federal government" will have a "major impact on the attitudes of subsequent generations of Indian leadership. The memory of congressional committees and bureaucrats in Washington terminating the existence of hundreds of tribes across Indian Country will stand as "a chilling reminder that Congress can unilaterally decide to extinguish the special status and rights of tribes without Indian consent."

The government held 13 hearings on the subject of termination in 1953. The overwhelming majority of Indian testimony at those hearings was against termination as a policy.

Tribal leaders had financial concerns as well as worries about the loss

of rights established in the signing of treaties. They also worried about a loss of connection to the land.

Utah Sen. Arthur Watkins, who at that time was the chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, expressed his dissent during the hearings.

"I think we have been operating now in many cases over 150 years as guardians of some of these Indians and I do not think we can point with any degree of pride to what we have accomplished," he said.

A generation later, leaders of the U.S. government began to realize what a failure termination of Indian tribes had been.

According to background information supplied to members of the 93rd Congress while considering the Restoration of the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin in 1973, termination of Indian tribes had the opposite effect of what had been intended. "Experience has shown that termination was not a solution for the problems facing America's original inhabitants and the Congress has attempted to correct this error and restore federal recognition to terminated tribes ..."

Restoration of the Menominees and later the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians "represented the first significant rejection of the termination policy of the 1950s."

In the years prior to Restoration in 1977, the people of the Siletz Tribe who had remained on their known reservation lands suffered because they stayed.



Robert Rilatos and Art Bensell at Siletz Valley A-frame
(Capital Journal photo by Gerry Lewin)

Unemployment among tribal members was more than 40 percent, the average family income was only \$3,000 and half of the tribe's young people had not finished high school.

Facing the devastating effects of alcoholism and other significant health problems, tribal leaders began meeting in the late 1960s in hopes they could reorganize. Tribal leaders incorporated in 1973.

A Senate Report to the Indian Affairs Committee considering the Siletz Restoration proposal felt that the people of the Siletz Tribe met the criteria for Restoration because, "There exists an ongoing, identifiable community of Indians who are members of the formally recognized tribe; the Siletz community is located in the vicinity of the former reservation; the group has continued to perform self-governing functions; there is widespread use of their aboriginal language, customs and culture; and there has been a marked deterioration in their socio-economic conditions since termination."

The report stated that tribal members would benefit from Restored status as Indians.

"Restoration would make a large difference both to individuals and the tribe as a whole in that they would be eligible for benefits. Tribal members would be eligible for the health services provided by the Indian Health Service. Many of the other programs of these agencies would be available to the tribe and its members to address the social and economic problems they are now experiencing. Just as important to the people of the Siletz is the fact that this legislation will restore to them their dignity as members of an Indian tribe."

Current Tribal General Manager Brenda Bremner feels the effects of termination are still being felt by tribal members today.

"Termination is about identity," said Bremner. "Our people today are

still struggling with issues that are a direct result of being from a terminated tribe. They are still dealing with issues of cultural identity, with issues of self-worth, and with issues of knowing who they are."

Now that Loraine Butler has become a leader in her tribe, she feels even more strongly that members of the tribe need to be willing to stand up for their legacy as Indian people.

"I feel, as a Tribal Council person, that we have to fight every day to keep what we have," said Butler. "It could happen again. This is a daily battle to prevent termination from happening again. We're still fighting termination today."

From the ashes of termination has come a revitalization of an entire tribe.

When the tribe was restored, then-Tribal Chairman Arthur Bensell said his people would honor their ancestors by returning tribal members to their status as proud, self-sufficient people.

"The Confederated Tribes of Siletz have reason to celebrate," said Bensell in 1977. "The Restoration Act restoring federal recognition to the Siletz has become a reality. The Tribal Council and all those involved have not wavered in their purpose to regain tribal Restoration and procure the education, health, welfare and special project benefits which they felt would assist them in becoming useful citizens in our tribe, state and nation."

Bensell then challenged future generations to carry on the important work of putting the tribe back together again.

"We now have the tools which we have been fighting for, therefore, let us not fail in our efforts in combating the social and economic problems experienced by our people after termination. Let us not lose the enthusiasm and devotion to the cause of our people, which culminated in this historic event. Through a united effort we can continue to be proud that we are Siletz Indians."



This photo of Tribal Council member Loraine Butler and her sisters, Laverne (l) and LaVonne (r), was taken in 1959, just five years after termination.