



Beloved Tribal historian Charles Wilkinson walks on

By Diane Rodriquez

Charles F. Wilkinson III, author of the Siletz Tribal history book *The People Are Dancing Again*, died June 6, 2023, after suffering two strokes. He was 81.

Wilkinson was a friend of more than 50 years to the Siletz Tribe, starting when he worked for the Native American Rights Fund in the 1970s and served as the Tribe's attorney during the fight for Restoration.

"I was the attorney at NARF in Boulder in the early '70s. Joe Lane and Robert Rilatos came out and made a really impressive presentation to the attorney staff on why they wanted NARF to get involved in Restoration. I was the attorney for the Menominees, the first restored Tribe, so it was probably natural that I would pick up Siletz, which I did," Wilkinson told *Siletz News* in 2010.

After the Tribe was restored to federal recognition in 1977, Wilkinson maintained contact with Siletz in part by giving talks at the reservation and participating in events like Run to the Rogue. In her June 2009 Chairman's Report in *Siletz News*, Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley shared the following from Wilkinson:

"I came out for the Feather Dance in June (2005) and was deeply moved by what I saw. It made me begin to realize the magnitude of the cultural revival that Siletz people have created. In September, I came out for the Run to the Rogue and was overwhelmed by the power of the land and the presence of the ancestors ... Doing the interviews and reading caused me to appreciate much more deeply the amazing cultures that thrived in Western Oregon before the diseases, wars, removals and land grabs ... Siletz people should be lastingly proud of that heritage and I hope that this history will describe the ancestors in a way that gives them the respect they so richly deserve."



File photo

Charles Wilkinson greets the late Agnes Pilgrim at a book signing for *The People Are Dancing Again* during Restoration Celebration activities in November 2010.

In his research and writing of the history book, Wilkinson learned that despite his familiarity with Siletz, he learned a lot about the Tribe and its people as he was researching and writing the book. He found a common thread that has survived from ancestral times through the lives of today's Siletz Tribal members.

"I wrote the book chronologically, started in ancestral times before white people came. Then white people came and fairly late in the process, I realized what was the connecting thread through everything – the staying power of Siletz people. It's impossible that they've withstood what they've endured. Love of land, family, community, culture, sovereignty – it's a great event in history of the United States, what Siletz people have been able to accomplish.

A stable government that celebrates culture, has a sense of entrepreneurship, places heavy emphasis on education and health. So much just keeps happening – it's a great tribute to a great many people."

"I first met Charles in sept 1975. He was already working on Tribal restoration. He was most enthusiastic about restoration. The council spent many evenings and weekends with Charles and as restoration moved forward we became very good friends," said Pigsley. "He visited us often, enjoying pow-wows, restoration and Run to the Rogue. His smile and friendliness to our members will always be our gift from such a great friend and man."

At the time of his passing, Wilkinson was the Moses Lasky Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Colorado in

Boulder. He also had been named a Distinguished Professor, one of just 25 on the UC-Boulder campus. He graduated from Denison University in 1963 and Stanford Law School in 1966. Early in his career, he taught at the University of Oregon School of Law.

"Charles was a beloved person in Indian country," said Professor Kristen Carpenter, who directs the American Indian Law Program, in an article on the University of Colorado Law School's web page. "From the Navajo and Hopi people in the southwest deserts and canyons to the Yurok, Nisqually, and Siletz people along the rivers and coasts of the northwest, Charles spent much of his life working with tribes and they came to trust him. Charles Wilkinson's deep, respectful engagement with Indigenous Peoples is a model that the AILP will always share with our students."

Over the years, Wilkinson has taken on many special assignments for the U.S. Departments of Interior, Agriculture, and Justice. He served as special counsel to the Interior Department for the drafting of the Presidential Proclamation, signed by President Clinton in September 1996, establishing the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah.

He acted as the facilitator in negotiations between the National Park Service and the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe concerning a Tribal land base in Death Valley National Park; in 2000, Congress enacted legislation ratifying the resulting agreement. In 2004, he served as the mediator in successful negotiations, involving salmon runs in the Cedar River, between the City of Seattle and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe.

He served as special advisor to the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition for the

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Siletz Tribal offices will close at noon on Monday, July 3, and will be closed Tuesday, July 4, for the Independence Day holiday.

In major win for Native families, Supreme Court upholds constitutionality of ICWA

WASHINGTON – On June 15, the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Haaland v. Brackeen*, and in a 7-2 opinion resoundingly affirmed the constitutionality of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

The Protect ICWA Campaign – made up of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, National Congress of American Indians, Native American Rights Fund and the Association on American Indian Affairs – released the following statement in response to the Supreme Court's decision in the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case:

"Today's decision is a massive victory for Native children, Native families and the future of Native peoples. The court's

decision affirmed that the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is constitutional, puts the best interests of Native kids first and is grounded in Tribal sovereignty. This ruling respects the work that Tribal nations have done for millennia to ensure Native kids stay connected to their families, communities and cultures whenever possible.

Not only will this ruling allow Indian Country to continue to advocate for the best interests of Native children, but it also reaffirms what we have said and known all along: Tribal nations are sovereign nations. Similar to states or foreign countries, Tribal nations have the inherent powers of self-government and have the right to provide for the social, economic, safety and cultural needs of their citizens.

For too long, ICWA's opponents have used cases like *Haaland v. Brackeen* to try to undermine Tribal sovereignty. Today, the justices have sent a clear message that these biased, ahistorical attacks have no legal foundation and will not be tolerated. We hope this decision will lay to rest the political attacks, but let this case show that Indian Country and its many bipartisan allies are united in defense of Native children and of Tribal sovereignty.

Today's ruling is a ringing endorsement of the protections that ICWA requires. The ruling reinforces that ICWA is binding federal law. The court's opinion adds momentum to collective efforts to increase ICWA compliance, enact state-based ICWA laws that build on ICWA's

strong foundation, and continue to support Tribal child welfare and justice systems.

Indian Country stands together in joy with the countless allies who have supported us throughout this case."

Native American Rights Fund (NARF) Executive Director John Echohawk said: "Today's decision affirming the constitutionality of ICWA is a major victory for Tribes, Tribal families and Tribal children, and it should put an end to the challenges to ICWA and the broader challenges to Tribal sovereignty. NARF is honored to have worked alongside all who stood to defend ICWA – including over 500 Tribes,

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