

Tribal incumbents face challenge to reelection bids

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

MISSION — Two years after Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation members swept out most of the incumbents on its board of trustees, several are making a bid to return to the board.

Ahead of the Nov. 9 election for the board and officers on the CTUIR General Council, tribal members held a virtual voters forum Monday, Oct. 11, that featured 14 candidates running for nine positions. Not all of the candidates attended the forum and the four candidates who are looking to return to the board after losing in 2019 — Aaron Ashley, Gary Burke, Rosenda Shippentower and Willie Sigo IV — were absent.

The forum's moderators, activist Briana Spencer and Don Sampson, a former board chair and executive director, provided each candidate time for an opening statement and answers to three pre-written questions covering a variety of topics, including tribal sovereignty, the environment and economic development.

Board chair

Two years ago, Chair Kat Brigham ran against the incumbent Burke to win the top seat on the board. Now she's running on her record as she faces a challenge not only from Burke but also from former Chair Elwood Patawa and former at-large member Justin Quaepts.

Brigham said she wanted to focus on rebuilding the Thornhollow Bridge and workforce development in her new term. On the topic of climate change, Brigham said she was more optimistic that work could be done with the arrival of the Biden administration.

"Everything is connected," she said. "You cannot draw a straight line, as many, many non-Indians have done, and say this is where we're going, we have to understand all of these things are connected."

Among the themes Quaepts touched on were American Indian civil rights and the need to end qualified immunity for police officers across the country.

"When you're honest (and) open, you don't have anything to hide," he said. "I've been harassed and stopped by police in this country for unknown reasons. It's not fair and it's not fun."

Burke and Patawa did not participate in the forum.

Vice chair

Jeremy Wolf was one of the few incumbents to survive 2019, but he decided against running in 2021. That opened up an opportunity for at-large member Jill-Marie Gavin, who is running against Ashley, a former at-large member who lost a race for secre-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A ballot box sits outside the Nixyaawii Governance Center on Mission on Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation on Nov. 9 will hold an election for its board of trustees and officers on the general council.

tary in 2019.

Gavin said she wants to continue working on the tribes' social services and highlighted her community radio show, which she uses to explain her political decisions.

"It's not always positive, because people don't always feel happy about what we do, but it's important that we remain accountable and that's what I want to do over the next two years," she said.

Ashley did not participate in the forum.

Secretary

When incumbent Secretary Sally Kosey was an at-large member in 2019, other board members attempted to remove her from office over a residency dispute. After a trip to the CTUIR Tribal Court, Kosey kept her seat on the board, won her election for secretary and saw all of the board members who tried to remove her voted out of office. In 2021, Kosey is attempting to hold her secretary position while facing challenges from David Wolf and from Sigo, a former general council chairman.

Kosey said she's learned a great deal since becoming secretary and praised the CTUIR for its strength before briefly addressing the residency issue.

"We grew up 5 miles off the reservation. Does that make me any less Indian?," Kosey said. "No. I'm Indian, every day I wake up and I want people to know that's why I'm here. I'm here to work for the people."

Wolf advocated for more services and benefits for the tribes' veterans and elders,

adding that other tribes have more robust services.

"I've listened to elders from other tribes who have their insurances paid for, for their health," he said. "Suddenly, their life is richer. Isn't this something that we'll think about doing for elders? How many more elders that we're going to lose?"

Sigo did not participate in the forum.

Treasurer

Tribal voters in the wave of 2019 elected Sandy Sampson as treasurer. She seeks reelection against Eugena Stacona.

Sampson said tribal government has been responsible in the way it's handled money that came from multiple rounds of COVID-19 stimulus and would like the tribes to explore new investments, such as growing hemp.

"Wheat is good, but we're looking at other sustainable sources," she said.

Stacona pointed to her experience in both public and tribal finance as making her a good candidate for treasurer and later added the general council should get more power to make policy making decisions.

"There's no checks and balances," she said.

General council chair

The general council, a body composed of the entire tribal electorate, votes for its own set of officers, but the council chair is the only position that also gets a vote on the board of trustees. Incumbent Lindsey Watchman was elected in 2019 and is running for a new term against Alan Crawford, a former general council chair

and board vice chair, and Andrea Hall.

Watchman talked about the need for the tribes to recover from the pandemic, but he said he appreciated everyone who continued to participate in general council meetings virtually.

Hall said she wants to grow general council membership and engage with disenfranchised tribal members.

"I've heard a lot of people say, 'I don't bother with the (Confederated Umatilla Journal), I don't look at the general council,'" she said. I want to change that. I told them, 'You're my intended audience.'"

Crawford did not participate in the forum.

At-large

All at-large candidates run on the same ballot, with the top four vote getters securing seats on the board. Incumbents Boots Pond and Cor Sams are running for reelection. Rounding out the field is Lawanda Bronson, Babette Cowapoo, Lisa Ganuelas, Michelle Moses, Toby Patrick and Rosenda Shippentower.

A member of the tribes' Law and Order Committee, Sams said the Umatilla Tribal Police Department recently underwent an external review that resulted in use-of-force training and body cameras.

"We want equity," she said. "We want reform. We want to ensure that we trust our police department."

Ganuelas talked about her experience advocating for the Yakama Nation and the CTUIR in state legislatures and emphasized the importance of the tribes fighting for water rights in the face of widespread drought.

Pond, the other at-large incumbent, talked about the need to keep the lines of communication open between the tribes and the city of Pendleton.

"They're right next to us so we need to at least, biannually (or) annually meet with them to figure out the issues that they have that affect us and our issues that affect them," he said.

Moses advocated for the tribes to preserve their traditional way of life and pass it down to their children and later added that water customers on the reservation who use it for agricultural purposes should be charged a regular bill.

While several candidates were interested in the CTUIR getting involved in the hemp industry, Cowapoo was more skeptical.

"Right now it's not selling, because it's overrated," she said. "And the market is flooded out."

Having run a huckleberry gathering camp for many years, Patrick said climate change was a threat to the tribes' treaty rights and their ability to gather, fish and hunt.



Shippentower and Bronson did not participate in the forum.

HEAR ME

MY CHIEFS

AND

PEOPLE

I WILL DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF WE THE PEOPLE OF THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE UMATILLA INDIAN RESERVATION, THE PAST GENERATIONS, THE PRESENT GENERATION, AND THE FUTURE GENERATION.

DEFEND ALL TRIBAL CONSTITUTION BYLAWS AND ARTICLES OF LAW

DEFEND ALL TRIBAL TREATY ARTICLES

EVERYTHING WE SAY AND DO HERE TODAY IS NOT FOR US, BUT FOR OUR CHILDREN, THEIR CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILDREN.

VOTE GARY BURKE

BOARD OF TRUSTEE CHAIRMAN

TUK LU KEY - 8-611

PAID FOR BY THE FAMILY OF GARY BURKE

Are you in pursuit of an inspiring career that encourages your community members to thrive?

Community Counseling Solutions

Is the place for you!

CCS is committed to offering their award-winning Behavioral Health, Addictions, and Developmental Disabilities services throughout Eastern Oregon and our rapid growth has allowed us to expand our employment opportunities.

Full and Part time positions available!

Ranging from entry level to Master's degree in **Morrow and Umatilla Counties!**

Details including wage and FTE status about each position can be found on our website:
www.communitycounselingsolutions.org

You may also contact the HR department at 541-676-9161 for more information.

CCS has a wonderful benefit package including, but not limited to, health, dental and vision insurance, 401K match, potential for tuition reimbursement, student loan forgiveness, relocation expenses and paid licensure supervision.

BE PART OF OUR TEAM!