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Grand Ronde members vote for financial future

By Oscar Johnson

The fourth of five community meetings set to solicit input from tribal members across the state on planning the financial future of the Grand Ronde Tribe took place in Grand Ronde last month.

Over 50 members — many employed at Grand Ronde's central offices — participated in the July 14 meeting which informed members and asked their view on topics ranging from

tribal social service programs to financial savings and investments. Similar meetings were recently held in Portland, Salem, Eugene, and Bend.

Before members broke into small groups to ask questions and list ideas on Grand Ronde's financial future, officials from the Tribe's executive, corporate, and intergovernmental divisions outlined their respective functions. The three-and-one-half-hour meeting ended with members voting on specific ideas or general areas to allocate funds.

"It was very positive," said Mike Larsen, Grand Ronde Facilities Manager who was one of four facilitators that lead the small group discussions. "People had some genuine concerns."

Larsen said his group touched on a variety of issues but indicated that getting allotment funds to accrue enough interest to be self-sustaining and holding meetings more regularly also seemed to be important to members.

"One of the main concerns in my group was to get more educated on



Education Division Manager Dean Azule facilitated a small group discussion at the Grand Ronde community meeting.

issues such as the endowments. We should continue to have these meetings annually, which I think we kind of fell out of doing. People had no way of finding out about these things," Larsen said. "People really felt like they are part of the process at the meeting, which is what we wanted."

What Grand Ronde area members wanted most was a healthy Elder pension which took the most member votes at the meeting followed by education. In addition to advocating for 100 percent subsidies for Grand Ronde college students, members also favored vocational training programs while some suggested starting a local tribal school.

In keeping with votes cast at earlier community meetings, many Grand Ronde members also indicated that they would like to see a tribal credit union, while, like many Salem voters, building infrastructure such as a water utility company and a trib-

ally-owned store was a high priority.

Housing was also near the top of the list of member priorities. Also similar to Salem's meeting, some Grand Ronde members, such as Russ Leno, said they would like to see traditional housing services for low income members extended to those in the higher bracket as well.

Although the Elder has owned his own home for a while he said it is long overdue for the siding and foundation to be repaired and he would like to see more funds with less income restrictions for Elders' home improvements.

"As far as I'm concerned — seeing as I'm an Elder — I'd like to see them help the Elders with Elder programs like pension and housing," Leno said. But noting the growth and improvement that has taken place in Grand Ronde over recent years, Leno added that "it's amazing to see what's going on."

Gorton's Robin Hood bill seeks to take from well-off tribes

By Oscar Johnson

Prosperous tribes may be robbed of \$12 million in program funding to help pay for their poorer counterparts and all would have to open their books to the U.S. government if a pending bill lets Uncle Sam sidestep its long-standing obligation to pay for vast aboriginal resources acquired long ago.

In an attempt to spread out \$760 million of insufficient federal funding for 557 Indian nations, section 129 of the Fiscal Year 1999 Interior Appropriations bill (S.2237) aims to redistribute the funds on an as-needed, per capita basis.

Also known as the "Robin Hood" or "Robber" bill, the provision was penned by Sen. Slade Gorton (R-WA), approved last month by a Senate subcommittee and is expected to reach the Senate floor shortly.

If passed in its current form, S.2237 would direct the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to withhold half of the moneys earmarked for the top 10 percent of the most affluent tribes and redistribute it to the bottom 20 percent of the poorest Indian nations for the 1999 fiscal year.

Tribes would also be subject to means testing, requiring them to disclose their annual incomes to the BIA in order to receive future federal funding.

Although it is estimated that as few as six tribes would lose half of their BIA funding under the proposed law, many tribes, including the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, are on guard.

"In the first round S.2237 probably wouldn't hit us," said Grand Ronde Acting Executive Officer, Greg Archuleta. But he adds that financial data currently used by the BIA dates back to 1996 — before the Tribe started benefitting from Spirit Mountain Casino revenues. "But in the future, with the growth that we've seen, if casino revenues increase it could effect us."

Archuleta also expressed concern over the bill's means testing provision.

"The Tribe considers its financial information internal," he said. "All the feds want to do is see how much

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