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AUGUST 15, 1998



SMOKE SIGNALS

A Publication of the Grand Ronde Tribe
Umpqua • Molalla • Rogue River • Kalapuya • Chasta

Council considers input from meetings

By Oscar Johnson

After a string of long-anticipated meetings in Portland, Salem, Eugene, Grand Ronde and Bend, member votes on future tribal spending are in and tallied, directing Council to make Elder pension, education and health security programs top priorities.

In a July 31 rap-up session following the last community meeting in Bend, Grand Ronde Council and staff studied voting results and shared insights on the public forums which were the first to be held outside of Grand Ronde in more than two years.

Nearly 30 Central Oregon members at last month's community meeting in Bend made the journey from surrounding areas such as Prineville and Warm Springs Indian Reservation casting most of their votes for the pension and Member Benefit plans as well as a tribal credit union.

Council members said the meetings were a positive experience and successful in garnering valuable input from members, leading the governing body to unanimously opt for more frequent member forums.

In the future, Council hopes to hold similar meetings every six months to a year with the next round set tentatively for next April.

"I like going there and meeting the people. We came out of the meetings with a lot of good ideas we had

not thought about," said Council Vice Chairman, Ed Larsen. "Of course we'll still be waiting for those writings from people who were not able to attend the meetings."

Council also noted how the majority of members voiced support for paying into stable, more comprehensive services and long-term investment over whittling away tribal revenues through member benefit disbursements.

Despite this vocal support, however, when the votes were tallied members showed that the modest annual payouts rank No. 4 (receiving 68 votes) out of 13 categories.

Education and health security respectively are the second and third most important programs to voters while Elder pension was deemed the No. 1 priority for tribal spending with 94 votes.

About 100 attendees of the five meetings voted, casting seven lots each for a minimum of three categories, gave input on behalf of the Tribe's 4,130 members.

Of all the new programs and projects suggested at the five meetings, opening a tribal credit union received the most support, ranking as the sixth most important priority with 58 votes.

Noting the large task of starting a financial institution, at last month's

rap-up meeting Council committed to exploring the idea further. Council Secretary, Ed Pearsall, also recommended looking into whether or not it would be more feasible for the Tribe to join an already existing credit union.

Mindful of their obligation to meet members concerns, Council also hopes that some criticism from what attendance at recent meetings showed are a vocal minority, can be addressed by increased public awareness.

Member questions about voting on decisions affecting the Tribe, limiting of programs to the Six County Service Area, and increasing the Member Benefit Fund are some of the issues that Council members may look to mediums such as *Smoke Signals*, additional public meetings or an ombudsperson to address.

Tribal officials believe it is vital for members to know that some tribal decisions do not allow time for a public vote; and that the limiting federally funded programs to the Six County Service Area is mandated by the state. They also said increased member benefits could draw negative publicity to the Tribe in its legislative struggles for more timber lands or to maintain gaming rights.

"Members need to be educated on how things work," explains Larsen who concedes that the Tribe might also need an ombudsperson to help meet such needs. "People keep saying we need to involve them more but it works both ways — they need to call up and let us know what their needs are."

Candidates answer tough questions

On August 1, the Election Board held a Candidates' Forum for tribal members who wanted to ask Tribal Council candidates questions about significant tribal issues. *Smoke Signals* has reprinted some of the questions and answers for the benefit of members who could not attend. Seven of the ten candidates were able to attend the Forum.

Why are you running, what is your agenda?

Barbara Lake: My agenda is firstly Indian Child Welfare. Our program needs a lot of work. There are things that fall through the cracks, and our children suffer because of it. And that was the main issue for me.

Gene LaBonte: My main thing is children and education. Many of our members dip into their Trust Fund in order to go to college. I think we should furnish tribal members with an education so they don't have to dip into their Minor Trust Fund. Our children could have that dividend as a nest egg for them when they grow up, and shouldn't have to use it for school.

Ken Gregg: My agenda is a question of the people. I don't know if it is a question of apathy on the part of our tribal members, or if it is by design by any one singular group. I feel the control of the Tribe needs to go to the people, not any one individual. I am not blaming anyone for the direction the Tribe has taken, but we are just a decade of broken promises by our federal government with our treaty problems. We still suffer from that. I don't want to see the same thing from our own people. We don't want to see a welfare system here. When it comes to sharing the wealth with our people, it is their right. They do want something out of it. We are not able to communicate well with people. At this

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Members' top priorities from community meetings

Program	Portland	Salem	Eugene	Grand Ronde	Bend	TOTALS
Elder's Pension	21	7	18	21	27	94
Education	29	4	18	19	13	83
Health Security	20	4	18	12	23	77
Member Benefit	19	7	14	9	19	68
Housing	18	4	11	19	11	63
Credit Union	16	6	13	3	20	58
Grand Ronde Infrastructure	0	11	13	13	0	37
Additional Timber Lands	15	0	7	6	0	28



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ELECTION DAY — September 5, 1998

TRIBAL OFFICES & CLINIC CLOSED
Labor Day — Monday, September 7

GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING
Sunday, September 13 at 11:30 a.m.
Community Center — Meal Provided