

Proposed Tribal Budgets Discussed

■ Long meeting covers range of issues, from those of personal to community concern.

By Ron Karten

The November General Council meeting was held on Sunday, November 6, at the Tribal Community Center. Here are the highlights:

Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy called the meeting to order. Tribal Elder Nancy Coleman offered the invocation.

Tribal Financial Officer led a summary of the 2006 Tribal budget process. At the time of the meeting, all department heads had submitted proposed budgets and the Tribe had a handle on the amount of funds it expected to pay for these budget items.

While more spending was proposed for the coming year than funding expected to be on hand, a month long process of public input and Tribal Council analysis will, by Tribal statute, end with a balanced budget by year's end.

Details are available in the publication, *Council News*, a newsletter for Tribal members only that is expected to be in Tribal member hands soon.

Tribal members raised a couple of similar type complaints: one that the Portland-based Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest (NARA) is not doing its job; another that Tribe and casino Human Relations departments have a "hit list" to get rid of certain employees; and a third, by Tribal member and casino employee Larry Risteen, who said that he is getting no disability payments after injuring himself on the job. Though he believed the situation at the casino was physically dangerous, it also was entirely legal, he said.

Each of the cases pitted community or individual perceptions of injustice against legally justifiable activities.

In the first instance, Tribal Chair-

woman Cheryle Kennedy said that NARA has to "meet accreditation criteria" before the Tribe invests money and programs for Tribal members there.

In the second instance, a number of Tribal Council members, including Vice Chair Angie Blackwell and council member Chris Mercier each said that Tribal members should bring proof about a "hit list" before raising it at council. Nobody showed proof during the meeting, but Tribal members have been raising this same question for months. The Tribe faces a similar disconnect when it comes to the hunting, fishing and collecting rights of Tribal members, that is: state laws vastly reduce these rights though all through Indian Country, these laws are perceived to be unjust and even illegal.

In the third instance, Risteen said that it was a question of "people not fitting into certain boxes. Last month, I was sad. This month, I'm getting angry. After eight years (of working for the casino), I'm going to be bankrupt. If I'm going to lose everything, somebody has to be accountable."

Tribal Elder Janet Phillips suggested that Risteen contact an attorney.

"I did," said Risteen. "The lawyer said that I don't have a leg to

stand on."

The question, said Risteen, is "where does your moral responsibility start?"

"Larry has access to our catastrophic funds (a fund set up years ago



Tribal Financial Officer Larry Kovach

to fill in when Tribal members fall through the cracks)," said Social Services Program Coordinator Ron Hudson, "but the question is, how much can we do?"

"The Tribal Council needs to get with Human Resources Department and do something about this young man," said Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council member Val Grout.

"We are talking about those who have not fit into the box," said Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom. "We are going to be doing something about that."

Discussion on Tribal Council mem-

ber salaries and travel budgets found a supporter in Tribal Elder Betty Bly and no real opposition. Tribal Financial Officer Larry Kovach explained that council members have no authority to exceed budget amounts without going through a formal process to first transfer money from other accounts.

Budget Treasury Manager Rick Anderson said that money has in the past been formally transferred from Contingency funds to the Tribal Council's travel budget.

Studies continue on how to improve the Tribally funded health plans, said Kovach. While the plan saved the Tribe a one-time \$2 million in its first year, "we're not immune to (health care cost) increases." Now that the savings have been realized and health care costs continue their double-digit increases, the Tribe has embarked on a two-part plan design study: to look for additional savings for the Tribe and to learn about changes that will benefit members of the plan.

Like the rest of the country, the Tribe is feeling federal cutbacks to health and welfare dollars because of the ongoing war in Iraq, said Ron Hudson.

It was announced that Wellness Center Psychiatrist John Bellville, MD, will be leaving the Tribe, but has agreed to stay until a replacement is found.

A moment of silence honored Tribal members Marty George and Brian Thomas, both recently deceased.

Drawings were held: Tribal member Leona Harriss along with Tribal Elders Marcella Selwyn and Ida Paterson each won \$50. Dwayne Wheeler won \$100.

The next General Council meeting is scheduled for December 4, 11 a.m., at the Community Center. ■

Grand Ronde Tribal Council Members Testify Before Congress

CONGRESS continued
from front page

will change the nature and character of both the Indian gaming industry and the surrounding communities in which we live forever.

Her statements echoed the opening remarks of Chairman Pombo who pointed out that "The current situation throughout the United States has created conflicts between Tribes." Pombo also stated that this conflict has led to problems in surrounding communities which have been targeted for off-reservation gaming. Pombo claimed the current focus on Indian gaming has shifted attention from the positive aspects of gaming that accomplished great things for many Tribes. He said he is concerned about bad publicity for Tribes and the Indian gaming industry overall. And he is convinced that local communities should have more of a voice on lands that are not held in trust.

Joining Pombo were Rep. J.D. Hayworth and Rep. Dale Kildee, both champions for Indian Country in the past. Representative Greg Walden and Peter DeFazio from the Oregon Delegation were in attendance at the meeting.

Kennedy stated that plans by the Warm Springs and Cowlitz Tribes to open up off-reservation casinos close to the Portland metro area would have devastating impact on the

Grand Ronde. She stressed the concern over the number of Tribes seeking to have lands taken into trust for gaming far from their existing res-



"It's Policy, Not Personal." — Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy and Warm Springs Tribal Chair Ron Suppah share a relaxed moment prior to giving opposing testimony before congress. The two lunched together after their testimony emphasizing that their relationship remains cordial — it's only policy that they disagree on.

ervations, where they have no ancestral ties, or where other Tribes have strong ancestral ties. She outlined the history of the Grand Ronde Tribe, discussing the Termination Act and how it victimized the Grand

Ronde by destroying the Tribal economy and Indian land base. Kennedy then detailed the amount of acreage the Grand Ronde Tribe

had before and after termination. She emphasized the struggle the Grand Ronde had to get the point they are at today.

Deeron Marquez, Tribal Chair of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians echoed the sentiments of Kennedy and Pombo when he predicted a "public backlash" against Tribes and stated that "reservation

shopping" has now turned into Tribe shopping.

Ron Suppah, chairman of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs offered contradictory testimony. He stated that 32 elected officials in Or-

gon have endorsed their plan to build an off-reservation casino. Suppah also stated that Oregon Governor Ted Kulongowski is a supporter and has signed a compact with them allowing the off-reservation casino.

David Barnett, son of Cowlitz Tribe Chairman John Barnett was also present. The Cowlitz are seeking federal permission to establish their reservation on 152 acres along Interstate 5, about 20 miles north of Portland. The Cowlitz have brokered a partnership with the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut to build their proposed casino. Citizens Against Reservation Shopping and other groups have accused the Cowlitz of working to create a reservation just north of Portland because of its economic potential, not because of its cultural or historic significance to the Tribe.

While Kennedy spoke to the technicalities of the issue. Council Member Jack Giffen said he "spoke from the heart" when it came to the issue of allowing Tribes to build off-reservation casinos. He specifically addressed the Cowlitz lack of cultural or historic ties to the land they want to acquire for a casino.

Kennedy's testimony stressed to all present that the argument is about policy, not Tribe vs. Tribe. And that allowing off-reservation gaming will be detrimental for all of Indian Country and the State of Oregon as well. ■