

Tribal Elder Buddy West to run for state House seat

By Ron Karten
Smoke Signals staff writer

Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council member Wesley "Buddy" West, 65, is running for state representative from the 23rd District. If elected, West will become the first enrolled member of an Oregon Tribe to serve in the state Legislature.

The 23rd District represents parts of Benton, Linn, Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, including all of Willamina and Sheridan, but not Grand Ronde, which is in District 10. West lives in Sheridan.

"I've thought about it for a number of years. However, I wanted to get some government experience on the Tribal Council here before attempting it," West said.

West served on the Tribal Council from 2004 to 2007.

He cited his participation in conferences, including the National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Gaming Commission and American Tribes of Northwest Indians, as solid preparation for his current effort.

"Being a delegate helped me understand the political arena," he said.

While West, a Democrat, says that the state Legislature is doing a good job and addressing major issues including health care, education, the environment and gas and oil prices, he believes that many of community concerns and issues are not being addressed.

"They're being shelved or, in some instances, completely bypassed," West said. Among those, he cites

"our rising crime rate, meth and drug addiction, and the poverty in our community."

"These are all issues that the voters and community members are concerned about and interested in, and they're not being listened to," West said.

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~ Tribal Elder Wesley "Buddy" West

"I want to go to the individual voter and community member to ask what his concerns are, and to consider bringing them to the table and address them." West cites the extended bus route to Grand Ronde that he helped initiate while a Tribal Council member and a board member of the Yamhill Community Action Partnership as one of his significant accomplishments.

West is retired with 20 years of U.S. Army experience.

"I've been all over the world," he said, serving in law enforcement and recruiting for the service. He served three tours in Vietnam and was wounded once, leaving his left leg shattered. In Vietnam, he was stationed at Landing Zone Sally, near the demilitarized zone. He served with the 101st Airborne Division.

After retiring, West started a mobile home repair business, and also learned about heating, ventilation, air conditioning and electricity.

He enters the race with a current Democratic opponent in Jason Brown, who has run before and lost, but no Republican candidate has announced yet. Rep. Brian Boquist, a Republican from Rickre-

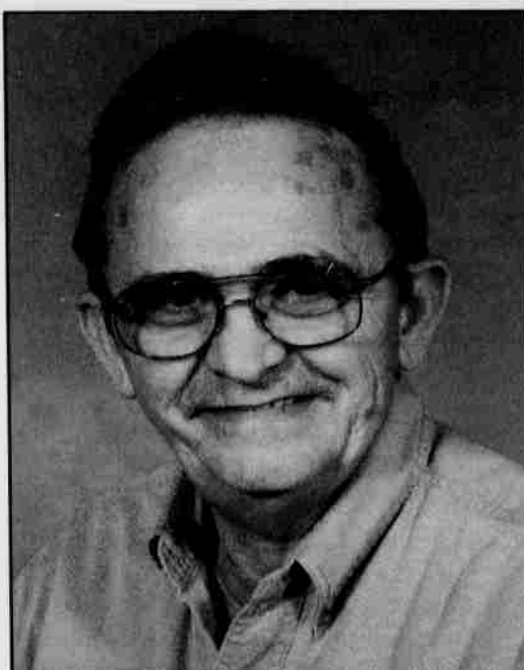


Photo by Toby McClary
Wesley "Buddy" West

all, currently holds the seat and is contemplating either a run for the state Senate or Darlene Hooley's 5th Congressional District seat.

In any case, West's philosophy is not competitive in the general sense of the word. "I consider all candidates having something to offer," he said.

Mary — his first wife and the mother of his adult daughter, Kathy, who lives in Nebraska — passed away in 1996.

After that, West closed his business in Tuscaloosa, Ala., and moved "back home to the Tribe." He met his present wife, Dee, in Grand Ronde and they were married in 1999. Dee has four children and one

granddaughter.

In his spare time, West works with Native American crafts, such as cradleboards, peace pipes and mandelas (they represent a spiritual power).

If West wins, it'll be a milestone for Native Americans in Oregon. Rep. Jackie Taylor (Potawatomi) served District 1 from 1995-01. Former Sen. Ken Baker, who served District 14 from 1993-99, and Sen. Ted Ferrioli, who currently serves District 30, each have made a point of saying that they have Indian ancestry, according to Karen Quigley, executive director of the Oregon Commission on Indian Services, though neither is enrolled in a Tribe.

March 11 is the deadline to file to run. The Oregon primary is May 20 and the general election comes on Nov. 4.

Democrats in Salem have been a big help, West said, putting him through a three-day candidate course.

"The main thing they taught me is that I can't do it all myself." At present, West is "getting together my volunteers, fundraising, and getting out signs and phone calls."

He currently has five volunteers and he's working on recruiting more. In addition, he says, "I need someone who can handle treasurer and financial reporting, and I also need a good manager," he said.

To get involved, call West at 503-843-2382. ■

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Vote deadline was Feb. 8

ENROLLMENT continued from front page

Tribal voters voted in favor of new enrollment standards proposed in amendments B and C, but neither one of those amendments surpassed the two-thirds approval benchmark to qualify for adoption.

Deadline to cast votes in Bureau of Indian Affairs election was noon Feb. 8.

If Amendment B had surpassed the two-thirds requirement, it would have removed the rule that an applicant have a parent on the membership roll at the time of the applicant's birth. The proposed amendment received 60.9 percent approval (700 yes, 450 no), meaning that the existing requirement remains.

Amendment C would have changed the definition of Grand Ronde blood to that derived from a direct ancestor on the official Tribal membership roll as of the date the applicant is accepted as a member of the Tribe. Because the amendment did not garner two-thirds approval (55 percent; 636 yes, 513 no), the existing definition — defining Grand Ronde blood as all Indian blood

derived from a direct ancestor on the Restoration Roll — remains unchanged.

The two failed amendments aimed to solve a longstanding problem of certain family members being eligible for Grand Ronde Tribal membership while their siblings are ineligible.

Changing the Tribal Constitution requires at least 30 percent of registered voters cast ballots in a special Bureau of Indian Affairs election along with the two-thirds requirement.

Of the 3,578 Tribal members eligible to register for the special BIA election, 1,491 members (41.6 percent) registered, and 1,159 voted (32.4 percent of eligible Tribal members; 78 percent of those who registered).

The vote was the culmination of a longstanding effort. Tribal Council appointed an ad hoc committee in April 2005 to look into the matter and propose Constitutional amendments.

The original proposition went out to Tribal voters as a two-question ballot, but was changed to three questions in September after three new Tribal Council members were elected. ■