

25th Restoration commemorative issue

Furse aided Tribe in many ways

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Elizabeth Furse was an employee of Oregon Legal Service's Native America Program during the early 1980s and instrumental in helping the Grand Ronde Tribe during its Restoration effort.

Afterward, she became a U.S. Congresswoman, succeeding Les AuCoin in the House of Representatives, representing Oregon's 1st Congressional District. She currently directs Portland State University's Institute for Tribal Government at the Hatfield School of Government.

Below are excerpts from a 43-minute interview with Furse conducted Aug. 1, 2008, at her Portland State University office. To hear the complete interview, contact the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department. A compact disc copy was donated to the department for Tribal historical purposes.

Q. Why don't you start and then I will follow up with questions.

A. To understand the Restoration of the Grand Ronde Tribe, you have to understand the context in which it occurred. ... It was in the era of the real hot fishing and hunting rights battle both in Oregon and Washington state. A member of Congress, who was an excellent member, Congressman Les AuCoin, felt that he had really spilled a great deal of political blood on the Siletz (Restoration in 1977). Therefore, when Grand Rondes came to him for this bill, he told us very early on ... that there would be no hunting or fishing rights.

At the time, I was working for Legal Services. I knew enough about legislation to know that it is almost impossible to get a highly controversial bill through the Congress. Any hunting and fishing rights would have been very controversial, to the point that I do not even think the Senate would have appreciated them.

So, what we got was a very strong bill for Grand Ronde with the opportunity to come back two years later to do a reservation bill. Sen. Mark Hatfield, who is probably the preeminent supporter of Indian Tribes, he and Senator Inouye (Daniel Inouye of Hawaii) are probably the two who most supported Indian Tribes.

Sen. Hatfield told us right at the beginning ... he told us very clearly that we would need to get the support of other Tribes in Oregon, especially the Warm Springs Nation. At the time, right after the Grand Ronde Restoration there was a thing put together called "New Tribes Money" that meant that if a



Elizabeth Furse

Tribe became federally recognized, for five years that the monies for that Tribe came out of a separate fund other than the BIA.

New Tribes Money was very important, but prior to Grand Ronde, that was not set aside. Specific monies meant that if a Tribe were federally recognized, monies that would go to that Tribe would come out of Tribal monies for all Tribes. So, in other words, to get a Tribe newly restored or newly recognized in the state, it meant that Tribes in the state were going to take a financial hit. I do not think people understand that.

Following Sen. Hatfield's advice, Tribal Council and I went to the Warm Springs Council and presented the possibility of a bill. Warm Springs very graciously and very enthusiastically supported it despite the fact it would mean a lessening of their Tribal money. When we had that support, we went to Sen. Hatfield with that and he was very pleased. It made a big difference to him because he is very close to the Warm Springs people.

We also received the support of the other federally recognized Tribe in Oregon, the Umatilla Tribe. The Siletz was federally recognized very shortly before that ... I think it was in 1977 when Siletz were recognized and the Menominee were recognized in 1973.

So, the political climate in Oregon was quite difficult for the idea that a Tribe would be newly restored. There was a huge amount of opposition from hunters and fishers. There was tremendous opposition from John Hampton, who owned Hampton Lumber. He was deeply opposed to any idea that the Tribe would receive any kind of federal lands. ...

I think people have to understand what the political situation was like in Oregon and Washington state at that time. There were effigies hung of Judge (George) Boldt, who did the Boldt decision in Washington state. People's political lives were very much involved in this tremendous controversy.

... So, hunting and fishing was never a part of the idea of what the Tribe would be restored to and what the Tribal Council wanted. Tribal Council wanted services, such as education, health services, all of the

services that are available to a federally recognized Tribe. That was what the Tribe was after, and quite rightfully so.

As soon as the President signed the bill ... that same day federal

services are available for Tribal members. At the time of Restoration, the Tribe only owned the cemetery and a very small shack. We did most of this work; well Tribal Council met and worked all the time, no running water. The differences and changes that have occurred because of federal recognition would be hard for people to understand, to truly understand.

Tribal Council did the great bulk of the work, especially Kathryn Harrison. She went around the state, particularly in that area, doing educational forums. Kathryn would go to the most hostile groups and explain the reasons for this act of Congress, and receive support. When this bill was introduced, we had access to hundreds of letters of support. That made a huge difference because the Tribe said that it was an issue of justice, and, of course, it was. I think that we should really thank and congratulate that Council for sticking with it.

For the people of Grand Ronde who funded these trips, there was no money to go back to Washington, D.C. There was nothing. There was no funding for those Council members to have salaries; everything was done on raised money. We got a couple of foundation grants that helped some. By and large that effort was funded by Tribal members. People would do bake sales, people would do little get-togethers.

When we finally went to what was called the Indian Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, which is now in the Natural Resources Committee, when the Tribe testified they testified on the issue of justice. They testified on the issue that they once more wanted to join the family of Indian Nations to work together with other Indian Nations to support Tribal programs and Tribal people. It was a very impressive testimony.

Q. What is your memory of the first time you went out to Grand Ronde and met with Tribal Council?

A. I had talked to Marvin Kimsey, who was chairman, and said, "Let me come out and meet with you." I went out and there was this tiny concrete building, and in it were the Council members. They very graciously had coffee and cookies. We met there, a very simple place, but

they were all working together.

We set out a strategy on how to get this Restoration legislation passed. It was not an easy thing, and when I say not an easy thing I do not mean it was hard for me. I mean it was a hard piece of legislation. We think, "Oh, there have been lots of Restoration bills." ... It took awhile. We had to introduce it, too, I believe two different Congresses because it did not go through the first time. We went back the second time and we included in that bill that there would be an opportunity to come back in two years, a mandate really to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to come back with a reservation plan.

Basically, my job was to be a cheerleader, to try to sort things out, to smooth out things as they happened. They were feeling pretty remote and isolated at the time. They had been told they were not an Indian people, that they were not a Tribal government. This was a very discouraging time for them. They were an amazing people though. They had grit and persistence.

... Therefore, we set out a strategy and stuck to it. We were going to get the support from the community, and that the Tribe would agree not to fight. It is absolutely vital that you have the support of the community. You cannot have people in the middle saying, "I do not like this" or "I do not like that" when you are doing legislation. You cannot present a controversy to the member of Congress; they will stand away from it, and rightly so. Why should they get in the middle of someone else's fight?

The Council was excellent at keeping everybody together. We, of course, had many public meetings, explaining to the Tribal members what was in the bill, what the bill was going to have. I think everybody was very apprised of what was in the bill. They had the opportunity to have Don Wharton as counsel because they really could not afford counsel at the time. He, as the director of Legal Service's Native American Program, provided them the legal counsel. He is an excellent lawyer. He has worked nationwide on many important Tribal issues. So, they had excellent legal advocacy.

Q. Don Wharton said that when you came onboard you were very good at your people skills, contacts, helping to put Tribal members up in Washington, D.C., when they went to testify, your ability to handle the media by creating slideshows and things like that.

A. Well, you know I really was working full time on it. The issue for the council was that they had jobs; they were not being paid to be Council members as they are now. They had to have other jobs. So, what I was able to provide them

See FURSE
continued on page 19