

Meeting will be first with new administration

WASHINGTON, D.C.
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ways to address these challenges.”
“I’m going to do my part in educating the new administration of our Tribe’s history, ceded, usual and customary areas, and issues pertaining to us as a terminated and then restored Tribe,” said Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker.

“This will be our first set of meetings with the new administration,” Greene said. “As such, we will need to give some background and history on the Tribe, including the location of the Tribe’s ceded lands.”

Greene said it is also an opportunity to clearly state the Tribe’s opposition to off-reservation gaming, how the Tribe believes off-reservation gaming is bad for Indian Country and how the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act is intended to build strong reservation economies.

The Grand Ronde Tribe opposes two current off-reservation gaming proposals before the Department of Interior — the Warm Spring Tribe’s proposal to build a new casino in the Columbia River Gorge at Cascade Locks and the Cowlitz Tribe’s proposal to establish a reservation and build a casino about 15 miles north of Vancouver in La Center right off Interstate 5.

“Cascade Locks and La Center are bad projects and represent reservation shopping,” Greene said. “The Grand Ronde Tribe supports the commutable distance guidance and the policy that Interior will not approve compacts unless the casino site is already qualified Indian land under IGRA. We expect both the guidance and the policy will be attacked early in the Obama Administration.”

“We want to set forth our opposition to off-reservation gaming and explain why we believe it is bad for Indian Country,” Giffen said.

Tribal representatives will be meeting with Oregon Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, Oregon Reps. David Wu and Kurt Schrader and Department of Interior officials, including Deputy Assistant Secretary George Skibine.

Ken Salazar, a former Colorado Senator, became President Obama’s new Secretary of the Interior and has final say on any new Indian casinos, including the Warm Springs and Cowlitz proposals.

Greene and Giffen said the Tribe also will ask Wyden, Merkley and Schrader to sponsor an amendment to the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act that would require the Tribe be consulted on proposals affecting resources in its ceded lands, which stretch up the Gorge to Cascade Locks.

“The main purpose of our trip is that there is a new administration now and to keep our issues at the forefront there is a need to educate the new players and to refresh the ones that have been there awhile,” Bobb said.

“The off-reservation gaming, our ceded lands and the fact that we need to be at the table on all legislative proposals affecting resources in those ceded lands.”

“There are many issues for the Tribe to remain vigilant on ... tax issues, means testing and a big one for me is to let the administration know

Trip forges, establishes congressional understanding

By Cheryle A. Kennedy
Tribal Chairwoman

Tribal Council members are planning to go to Washington, D.C., in February. Each year, Tribal Council members make a journey back east to continue to forge and establish an understanding with the Congress concerning matters important to the Tribe.

Indian Tribes have a unique relationship with the federal government because Tribes are sovereign nations. Some think that we merely have a minority status, but while we are a minority people, our status as a sovereign puts us in a political entity status.

Our purpose for going to Washington, D.C., is to assert our treaty rights as a sovereign. While in Washington, we will introduce the Tribe to the new administration, meet with new department heads and talk with various congressional officials to present our issues and request assistance, support and resolution.

There are several distinct issues we will be presenting, including a request to amend the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act to include our Tribe in the act because we are the Columbia River Treaty Tribe and it is the right thing to do. We also will seek inclusion in the proposed Mount Hood Wilderness Act because the Tribe’s ceded lands extend from the western slope of the Cascades westward. When both of these acts are amended to include the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, it will mean the U.S. government is honoring our treaties and places the Tribe at the table when any development is planned, when ancestral remains are discovered or when other actions affecting these areas are being planned.

The Tribal Council is responsible for communicating the position of the Tribe on legislative matters that impact the Tribe. I am seeking to be placed on the list for those who will testify in March before the Congressional Appropriations Subcommittee with jurisdiction over issues of importance to Indian Country. The purpose for testify-



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ing is to educate Congress on the differences between Tribes and clarify why the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde needs increases in funding for programs and services to Tribal members.

One major difference is that few Tribes were terminated with all Tribal assets being taken with little or no compensation. Termination severed the ties with the federal government, including financial assistance, and stopped services that continued to be provided to other Indian Tribes. Being restored means starting over, without land or resources.

Our infrastructural needs are monumental. Services and financial assistance given annually to other Tribes were restarted at Restoration, but excluded some basic services such as fire, safety and protection services. For nearly a 30-year Termination Era, we had nothing except our cemetery. So it is important to educate Congress on our history and encourage them to increase funding to assist in building our infrastructure and essential services as they have to other Tribes.

While there are Indian organizations like the National Congress of American Indians and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians that lobby for Indian causes, they represent the collective majority of the member Tribes within their organization. Not all Tribes have the same issues and we do not expect those organizations to lobby our cause when it is different than the majority. Yet, there are issues we support in common and we will similarly advocate for the passage of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the stimulus package to include direct funding to Tribes and other Indian bills.

Educating Congress is a continuous effort. Legislators change often so the Tribe must remain vigilant and keep newly elected officials apprised of our issues. Currently, we are considering language to amend other acts of Congress that were enacted prior to the Tribe being restored and we will seek the best approach on how to make the necessary changes and determine whether either of our senators would sponsor a change.

We are prepared to perform the work necessary to secure all rights in our ceded lands and be the leader in those discussions. The work before the Tribe is strenuous, but we will not relent in our effort to place the Tribe in the position it has the right to be in.

While those taking the message to Capitol Hill will be away from the Grand Ronde office, the work at Grand Ronde will continue with those remaining. ■

of the hardships the Grand Ronde face when trying to sit on boards, committees and groups that are in our ceded territories,” Sheker said.

“I think that we and all restored Tribes should have a vested right to be at the table. We should not have to wait to be invited or work so hard to be at a table that concerns us. It is not of our own making that we were left off these groups that were formed during the termination years.”

“I hope to build partnerships and strengthen the trust between our Tribe and the decision-makers in D.C.,” Giffen said.

Greene said other possible topics of discussion include:

- ◆ Requesting that the Tribe’s fee-to-trust transfers be treated under the less stringent guidelines for “adjacent lands” rather than the stricter guidelines for “off-reservation lands.” This change would help the Tribe’s attempts to recover its historic reservation.
- ◆ Discussing how it is inappropriate for the Internal Revenue Service to re-characterize critical general welfare programs, such as health care, as per capita payments for Tribal members.
- ◆ Supporting passage of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act with officials at the Department of Health & Human Services and

Indian Health Service.

Tribal representatives are taking position papers and the Tribe’s media kit with them.

“You always hope to leave an impression on them of the importance

of these issues to our people here in Grand Ronde, and the effects of their decisions on our people, our economy and all that our people have worked hard and long to achieve,” Bobb said. ■

Mayor’s Charity Ball



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg dances with his wife Kathy at the 20th annual Mayor’s Charity Ball at the McMinnville Community Center in McMinnville on Saturday, Feb. 7.