

Letters

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I recently had the opportunity to attend and participate in the Great Chili Cook-off Challenge, sponsored by the Grand Ronde Community Resource Center. The event was held at the Tribal Community Center.

It was a very enjoyable event. It was a place where the whole family could go and appreciate a relaxing and fun time. There was food, entertainment (a live band), a pie-eating contest, children dancing and lots of good old-fashioned visiting with family and friends.

Although I do not know the names of all of those who were involved, I just wanted to acknowledge and thank those who put it on. A great big thank you. It was great fun.

Joann Mercier
Roll #546

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I have recently been trying to file a complaint on an individual, but have had no success. I have gone through all the channels I could think of, trying to get someone to take this issue seriously. The issue in question concerns all Tribal members and is, in my opinion, one that needs to be addressed and not put aside like yesterday's news.

It really bothers me that people who are supposed to be concerned about the health and welfare of Tribal members cannot bring themselves to research this and get back to me. Not only that, but this issue has caused me great pain and suffering, to say the least.

Now when I ask who is responsible for the extra charges that are now added on because of one individual's arrogance, I get told, by a department head, that neither the Tribe nor the individual responsible for all of this is responsible for any extra money that has to be paid to get what I was after in the first place. Through no fault of mine are these other expenses my fault, yet I get told I have to pay them.

What do we as Tribal members have to do to get people to listen to us? Just how are we supposed to file formal complaints if no one listens? Or if they won't even return your phone calls? Who do we turn to now? No one wants to do anything, it seems to me. And that really bothers me because my issue with this individual is of great concern for me on how it can negatively affect the rest of the Tribal members.

Rod Smith
Roll #770

Dear Grand Ronde Tribal members:

This is a follow-up to my letter that was in the May 1, 2011, issue of *Smoke Signals*.

I have been told that our Tribe falls under the Code of Federal Regulations - Title 25 - Indians (25 CFR) because the Tribe is reorganized under a federal statute. Thus, amendments to the Tribe's current Constitution are conducted by the Secretary of the Interior in accordance with 25 CFR, Section 81, which lists specific rules for such elections. It is in reading these rules that I continue to feel the four changes proposed to our Constitution under Article V - Membership should each stand on their own merits and be broken out into four separate and distinct ballot issues, i.e., "Proposal Amendment A," "Proposal Amendment B," etc.

In 1999, we did not have a choice when five changes were proposed as one amendment to our Constitution under Article V - Membership. We have seen the wisdom of that decision and its negative impact.

Some enrolled Grand Ronde Tribal members are pushing to keep the four proposed changes to our Constitutional Membership Requirements as one item. I feel they are doing this because there is a strong chance that the new proposed definition of Grand Ronde blood would not pass if it is presented as a separate ballot issue.

Some of these Tribal members do not have an ancestor on any Grand Ronde roll or records of Grand Ronde members prepared by the Department of the Interior, from the time the Grand Ronde Reservation was officially created by the Executive Order of June 30, 1857, until sometime after 1986. Without the new proposed definition of Grand Ronde blood, these Tribal members would not be able to carry their lineage down to the next generation(s). This may be difficult to believe, but it is true, and can be verified through Tribal rolls or records and other documents that are available to the public in various formats.

It is my understanding that the proposed Constitutional Amendment - Enrollment Secretarial Election is on a fast track forward to have Tribal members registered to vote, ballots in the hands of those voters and completed ballots returned by the end of June 2011. However, it is still not too late for changes to be made to the structure of the Constitutional Amendment - Enrollment.

So, I urge you to contact each member of the Tribal Council and give your opinion, as to whether you feel the proposed Constitutional Amendment - Enrollment should be one item or broken down into four separate ballot issues, so that each issue can be voted on based on its own merit.

Thank you for your time.

Leroy Good
Roll #892

Dear Tribal members:

In the last issue of *Smoke Signals*, there was a letter by Leroy Good of Michigan which I would like to respond to.

As many of you know, I was a part of the Tribal Council who established the Enrollment Requirements Ad Hoc Committee in 2005. We knew there were issues of fairness and inconsistency with our Constitutional membership requirements. We didn't know what the solutions were, but we knew there was no better place to turn to than our general membership.

My sister, Debby Larsen, was the chair of the ad hoc committee and I know for a fact that they spent countless hours committed to learning everything there was to know about our specific Tribal enrollment issues. It's important to note that we balanced the committee with an equal number of people for and against changing the enrollment requirements as well as people who were neutral on the subject. They did a tremendous amount of research ranging from letters to interviews to long, long committee meetings. After more than a year, we had a group of virtual experts on enrollment and in the end they made their recommendations, which we accepted.

Everybody knows that the Constitutional election failed in 2008. The mistake I think Council made, aside from never publicly supporting the amendments, was stopping the election midstream and switching from two amendments to three. If you remember correctly, the BIA election was abruptly terminated and re-issued immediately after a shift in the Tribal Council majority. It was quite confusing, but that may have been what some members of Council wanted.

Leroy Good has publicly advocated that Tribal Council only move forward with an amendment that I can only assume would allow his family members to enroll. He is asking Tribal Council to support only this amendment and no other. His proposal will not address several of the unintended consequences of the 1999 Amendment or the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee. Sadly, it would once again leave many of the people adversely affected by the 1999 amendment out in the cold.

I pray Tribal Council never does something so cruel as to deliberately help one group but ignore another with the same problem. If we are going through the costly and lengthy process of a Constitutional election, common sense is to address all the issues now. It makes no sense to leave some of the pieces for a later date. And for heaven's sake, please don't propose changes unless you plan on backing them. I question whether or not Council members plan to back the amendment or if they are simply agreeing to issue a ballot as a campaign promise. There is a big difference.

In closing, I have wanted to say this for years, and no offense is intended to Mr. Good, this is really pointed at more people than him. Our Tribe is a democracy and everybody has a right to criticize what they don't like about the government, but when the messages are inconsistent, I question the credibility of the messenger. You can't say, "Per capita should be our number one priority" one day and then the next say "Please don't think about money, just vote for this amendment so my family can enroll." You can't have it both ways, so which is it? Anybody with basic math skills can figure out adding such a large number of new members to the roll means less per capita. Do you only support reducing per capita as long as your family gets in on the deal, but not for any other reason? This kind of contradictory double-talk is what falsely paints those championing enrollment justice as being only about the financial benefits of Tribal membership.

I hope the membership realizes not everyone thinks that way. I know many people, myself included, who support enrollment justice for everyone regardless of the impact it will have on their personal pocketbook. Being a Tribe is about the collective whole, not individual gain. As much as some people would like to reduce every issue to dollars and cents, we are not shareholders and our gains and losses go far beyond monetary indicators. Membership is much more than receiving a quarterly check.

Tribal Council, whatever you decide, I thank you for having the collective spine to finally address this issue. I plan on voting yes on whatever amendment(s) you propose. I have nothing to gain personally, but as a Tribal member, I benefit from knowing that my people are still benevolent and unselfish, the way our ancestors were. It is long overdue.

Angie Blackwell
Roll #1089

Dear members of the General Council:

I want to respond to a letter printed in the May 1 issue of *Smoke Signals* by Leroy Good. He has presented his own argument as to how Tribal Council should be handling the upcoming Constitutional Election on enrollment requirements. I would like to present my own, which is really not that different from what eight of our Tribal Council members believe.

Since the 1999 amendment with its unintended consequences, the topic of our Tribe's enrollment requirements has remained a fairly contentious one. In 2005, it appeared that Tribal Council was willing to make some effort to address the issues surrounding enrollment justice. They established an ad hoc committee, a task force if you will, composed entirely of Tribal members who were for, against and neutral in terms of changing our enrollment requirements, and basically assigned us the duty of trying to develop a solution to this divisive issue. The Tribal Council was quite generous, giving us both a budget and access to the expertise of key staff