

Letters

Dear Tribal members:

By the time you get this issue of *Smoke Signals* and read this letter, the Constitutional Election on enrollment will be under way. I hope we can finally put to bed this divisive issue that has been fracturing our Tribe since 1999.

Every current Council member paid lip service to enrollment in his or her campaign, and from what I can tell, not all of them were sincere. There has been little movement on this issue for the past three years. Even now some Council members are passive-aggressively sabotaging the matter by attempting to distract the membership and delay the election even further.

On Sept. 14, immediately following the Council Swearing-In, there was an attempt to stop the special election. Thankfully, most of Council stood their ground and reaffirmed their decision to allow us, the membership, to vote on this issue. Council members that tried to stop the election suggested the Council should issue an "advisory vote" to determine if/how we should be allowed to vote at all. We don't need another advisory vote that goes nowhere, we need an election with some teeth that Council has no choice but to implement and enforce.

If you can, Google the term "red herring" and consider if these distractions have any merit or if they are merely meant to detract from the bigger picture. We have a rare opportunity to vote on something other than Council elections and they are bickering over the manner in which the vote takes place? I think that we are smarter than they give us credit for. This may be the last chance we get to resolve these enrollment inequities for a long time. We have to make this one count.

To be realistic, the odds are against this amendment passing. Our Constitution requires a "double majority" and a "super majority" in order to pass an amendment. This means we need a 30 percent voter turnout and two-thirds of those people must vote yes. If 34% of the voters oppose it, the amendment will fail. If fewer than 30 percent cast a ballot, it will fail.

If all of Council supported this amendment and were using their influence, I think it would succeed. But some of our leaders flat out do not support enrollment reform, probably because their families are safe and they have nothing to gain from promoting this amendment. To be clear, my family is not affected by this amendment and I have nothing to gain (except for the satisfaction of knowing that we did the right thing).

Consider the package as a whole and hopefully you will see that some provisions are intended to offset the concerns created by others, like the possibility of "opening the flood gates." With a cap on annual enrollment increase, there will be no flood of new members. These pieces all fit together to create a fair and manageable enrollment policy.

Although this is a complex issue, the questions I ask myself are very simple: Should our enrollment requirements be the same for everybody? Should we all be able to pass on our Grand Ronde blood equally? Should we ensure minimum financial strain on our government and avoid the threat of Tribal overpopulation?

My answer is "yes" to all of them, which is exactly how I plan to vote on this Constitutional Amendment. Please register and vote, it's the only voice you have.

Angie Blackwell
Roll #1089

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

This is a memory of 1946 when I was 12 years old. My sister Sharon and I attended Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Ore. She was in the fifth grade and I was a sixth-grader. Our boarding school dormitory was McBride Hall, which was located very close to the train tracks. The train tracks are still there.

It is now September 2011 and I recall September 1946. The students were called upon to pick tomatoes from the fields that were located west of the Chemawa campus. It never fails me that when I smell the tomatoes ripening on the plants, I recall those days at Chemawa. The odor of tomato plants is very distinctive ... and we have some good times and some bad times in those fields. The bad times were when kids would throw rotten tomatoes. The good times were all the laughing and jokes we shared. I think maybe Pigsley Stadium is now where the fields were ... maybe that is where the orchards were since we also picked apples and plums in season. Interstate 5 is now where there were orchards and fields.

Another memory I recall is the students' cemetery located where the tall trees grow now on the old Chemawa campus. Most people don't know that in the old days, the children who died at an Indian boarding school were buried there. It is my understanding that the cemetery was bulldozed and cleared of tombstones and crosses in the 1950s. Say a prayer for all the souls far from their homelands.

The Grand Ronde cemetery contains graves of our unknown ancestors and Spirit Mountain also. The Kwelth Tahlkie culture board held a "Feeding of the Ancestors" ceremony on Spirit Mountain with Johnny Moses officiating. That was in the late 1990s. It is all sacred ground. I have heard the story that a Grand Ronde Indian wants to be buried in regalia. Then, when the Great Spirit looks down from heaven, He will see an Indian. Mah-see Hyas Tamonowis Tyee.

Claudette Velma May Parazoo
Roll #2923

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

Klahowya tillixam,

There is no need to introduce myself at this moment, but when it is time for you to know me, you will know me. But know this dear loved ones, my heart aches and my spirit longs to be among my people helping them. My heart's only desire.

I have been locked up in the iron haws soon to be 12 years now. My only real joy comes in knowing I will one day soon come home to take my seat among you, to share the knowledge my varied life and harsh lessons have given me. All I have, and I assure you these blessings are many, will be yours. I cry tears of joy when I think of this day. What a blessing to have such tears coming from my heart. The fire that keeps me alive, so full of hope.

Recently, however, my heart has been touched with some bitterness, which has turned to anger over a small thing I am trying to do that I need "official Tribal" help with that seems to confuse and baffle people about what it is I am asking.

You see, I have been trying to do this thing for more than three years now without any positive results until very recently. (Thank you, Leslie!) I don't mean to put people out there so I won't mention names, but I have written each council member more than once over these years to relate the specifics of my requests and what it's for. Not one has answered back; not one.

I could easily write a three-page thesis about this matter. How traditional values and concepts apply here and are being ignored and, believe me, I want to, but who will listen to one such as I? I will teach when I come home, and I am coming home to Grand Ronde.

The help I've needed? So simple! All I have asked for is an official statement from the Tribe, in any official capacity, about the kinds of benefits and resources I, as a Tribal citizen, have (will have) available to me as a resident of our Tribal community. Very simple, as I said.

I don't want money or handouts – just a letter. I have even typed up example letters of what I need doing, most of the work for those I have asked. This statement will go into my prison file so they can see that I have a community to go to and valuable resources available to me. This way they can see I won't be a burden upon anyone. And, by the way, I am blessed with many needed skills and talents – too many to list. Yes, I am very confident, too.

One way or another, my dear people, I will come home to you one day. Creator gave me (all of us) gifts to help ourselves. I have used these to help me. I have done, I do, my part. I reach my loving hand out to you because now more than ever I need your help. This letter may or may not help, but I have to try. I must do my part. It will help. Yes, it will.

I give my heart to you. I need your help, such a small thing will reap so many rewards. I believe this, too.

Please, if any concerned citizen thinks they can help and would like more details, extend your hand to me at the address below. I have family trying to help, but they really don't seem to understand the details of what is needed.

One last thought: If we all do what is right, thinking only with a traditional Native mind, heart and spirit, we can never go wrong.

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Employee recognition



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Nadine Burt, Behavioral Health secretary, hugs Tribal Council member Chris Mercier during the Employee Recognition Barbecue for the second quarter of 2011 in the Tribal gymnasium on Wednesday, Sept. 21. Also congratulating employees was Tribal Council member Toby McClary, left, and Tribal Council Secretary Jack Giffen Jr., right. Sixty-three employees marked an anniversary of employment with the Tribe, including Burt with seven years. The event also included a lunch provided by the Mək Mək House, bingo games and a prize giveaway to Tribal employees.