

Letters

Dear Tribal members:

I am a Tribal member who is part of a "split" family. I have two daughters who are Tribal members and one son who was a Tribal member, but was disenrolled in 2008. The three children have the same parents and the same blood quantum. They are now old enough to ask why the older two are Tribal members and the youngest one is not. No matter how I explain it to them, their response to my explanation is always "but that's not fair."

I hope that each Tribal member will ask themselves how they would explain the current enrollment situation to their family members if they were one of the "split" families.

Please vote "yes" on the constitutional amendment to change our enrollment criteria.

Mike Portwood
Roll #2936

Dear Tribal members:

Every once in a while we are faced with a decision that will impact others a lot more than ourselves. The upcoming constitutional election on our Tribe's membership requirements is one such point.

If you have been reading *Smoke Signals* or following the online dialog on any of the assorted Facebook sites, to say this is a contentious issue might be an understatement. But I personally think much of what you are reading is fueled by a vocal minority. The last constitutional election in 2008 showed that a majority of Tribal members support enrollment reform. If most of you vote "yes" on this looming amendment, as I plan to do, we can put this issue to rest.

For anybody who wants to question my motivation in supporting this amendment, let me make several points.

First, I have an ancestor on the Restoration Roll, so my own situation doesn't change or improve either way. Second, while I know a number of people who will be helped by this amendment, the vast majority of them I don't know. How could I? In fact, the one vocal group who this helps has made it abundantly clear they are not fans of mine, or of my brother. But I support it nonetheless. Because to oppose something just because it helps somebody who may not like me or who I may not like is the worst kind of politics, and should have no place in our Tribe. My motivation for promoting this amendment is simple: fairness.

I've learned over time to see both sides of an argument and could see reasons to vote "no." Oppose bundling? I get it. Slightly less per capita? Even easier to understand, though often overstated. They aren't real Grand Ronde Indians? I'll never agree with that kind of thinking, ever.

You can call me naïve, or idealistic. But I really have a hard time believing that when we were restored in 1983 that we planned on excluding people who have a right to be members based on technicalities. But we have been doing exactly that since 1999.

There are plenty of people who are more than willing to share their stories. I'd recommend asking them.

The truth is we are very lucky to be Grand Ronde citizens. We are a Tribe that cares for and takes care of its people. All of us have had our lives improved because we are descended from Indians who once roamed western Oregon. This blessing is something we should be sharing with fellow descendants, not quarreling because they belong to such-and-such family, or because we might receive less per cap. Imagine yourself, just for a moment, in their shoes.

Please vote "yes."

Bryan Mercier
Roll #1357

Dear Smoke Signals:

I would like to thank Tribal Council for moving forward with the Enrollment Amendment vote.

While I do not think the new amendment is perfect, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to correct the enrollment injustices brought about by the 1999 amendment.

Too many people with the proper blood quantum have been denied their rightful place in our Tribe. Too many families are "split," with some children enrolled and some denied. We are a caring people. I ask that you open your hearts to these families in distress.

My family and I encourage everyone to vote "yes" on the Enrollment Amendment now before us. It's the right thing to do.

Debi Anderson
Roll #3264

Dear Tribal members:

I'm writing this letter as a grandmother who has experienced the sorrow of having to deal with my grandchildren not being accepted as Tribal members because of the 1999 constitutional amendment.

It has been very painful to try to explain to these grandchildren why they have not been accepted into the Tribe and their cousins have.

I would be eternally grateful if my fellow Tribal members would vote "yes," rectifying broken families and broken hearts.

Dwane Modrell
Roll #2590

Dear Smoke Signals:

Two enrollment measures that we previously voted on will again be on the upcoming ballot. Both measures won a majority of the votes, but did not achieve a two-thirds majority.

My hope is that enough voters will want to heal split families so that we can achieve a two-thirds majority on both of these measures in this election.

My three children have split families, and it is painful for all of us. This issue has been in front of us and has occupied countless hours of the council's time, and it would be nice to put it behind us so the council and the Tribe can move on to other pressing issues.

Marilyn Portwood
Roll #2915

Dear Tribal members:

I am hoping that you read this letter with an open mind and, more importantly, an open heart. As you know, the 1999 constitutional amendment had a number of unintended effects, including split families and making some Tribal members with sufficient blood quantum unable to pass on Grand Ronde blood to their children. I know firsthand the emotional distress this caused a lot of fellow Grand Ronde Tribal members. I know because I belong to one of those families. I am one of those Tribal members.

For the past decade, I have devoted a lot of my personal time trying to correct some of the unexpected side effects of the 1999 amendment. I was one of the first Tribal members to put in an application to the Enrollment Requirements Ad Hoc Committee in 2005, and was lucky enough to serve. We put a lot of time and thought into our recommendations to the Tribal Council, and although the language may not have been what every one of us wanted individually, there was a consensus amongst a very diverse and opinionated group of Tribal members.

That is why I believe our recommendation, had it been implemented, would have helped solve a large portion of the enrollment problems that continue to hurt our Tribe since 1999. Sadly, the major parts of our recommendation failed in the 2008 constitutional election. A clear majority of Tribal members agreed with them as evidenced by the vote totals, just not the two-thirds majority needed to amend the Constitution.

We are now looking at another constitutional election. I can see that the language council has put forth for a vote is not identical to the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation, but still solves the same problems we saw. That said, I am urging you to register and vote in the upcoming constitutional election, and to please vote "yes."

I think the language is fair, equitable and will come at little cost to many of the services we as Tribal members receive. Furthermore, it would end a lot of heartache in some of our Tribal families, and opens up a lifetime of opportunity for many of our Tribal children and youth, many of whom should be members of this Tribe.

Diana Norton
Roll #2599

Dear Tribal members:

My name is Wesley "Buddy" West. I had the honor of serving you on Tribal Council years ago. Thank you to all who supported me in my reelection bid this summer.

Though I did not get elected, that doesn't mean my goals as a potential council member get abandoned. One of those is finally putting our enrollment problems to rest. I am writing this letter in hope that you will join me in voting "yes" on the upcoming constitutional election. The problem has been going on long enough and we are finally being given the chance to solve it.

I am not writing this to gain votes, because elections aren't for another year. Nor am I writing this because my family will somehow benefit. Many of us have ancestors on the Restoration Roll, so we aren't affected one way or the other. But I do believe that passing this amendment is the right thing to do.

People have their issues with some of the language and that is understandable. Many people it seems are concerned with the roll being opened up too much and we'll be flooded with too many new Tribal members. But I do believe that is why this proposal includes a cap on the number of people who can enroll every year. So any notions about the "floodgates" opening and our Tribe being sucked dry of resources are hogwash. The language on the cap is meant to specifically to stop that.

I do not expect all of our enrollment problems to be solved by this amendment. There will still be future issues we have to contend with, like diminishing blood quantum. But what we are voting on right now deals with the unintended consequences of the 1999 amendment, like split families and blood being passed on inconsistently. It also respects the council's goals in 1999 of being able to control Tribal population growth.

Yes, I can see that people are hung up on whether to split up the votes into four or five or whatever. My question is the last time they did that with a constitutional amendment, how did that work out? Not so good as I recall. Not much changed.

Really, what is there not to like about this amendment? I am voting "yes" and hope you'll do too.

Wesley West
Roll #842