

Tribal-state summit assesses relationship

By Ron Karten

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LINCOLN CITY — The posting of national, state, military and Tribal flags opened the Government-to-Government Summit on Nov. 15 at Chinook Winds Casino.

The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians hosted this year's event and the flags were carried alternately by state and Tribal leaders as the Siletz drum, West Coast Boys, played to open a full day of meetings.

This was the 13th annual conference initiated by Gov. John Kitzhaber with Executive Order 96-30 during his first term as Oregon governor.

"This is far more than a statutory obligation," Kitzhaber said. "For me, it is a deep personal obligation."

One theme that speakers returned to again and again was the value of "mutual respect and trust," in the governor's words.

Developed over time, state and Tribal governments have each recognized the extra work required to continually train leaders and staff members who take over leadership positions.

"How do we bridge the gap when we have changing Tribal Council members and changing state officials?" asked Delores Pigsley, chairwoman of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. "How do we set in policy the way we're going to work together?"

"It is up to us to continue to work on these relationships," said Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy.

And related to that was an oft-cited criticism that state policies often fail to reach local level state employees.

"We've grown a lot in last 25 years," said Burns Paiute Tribal Council member Charlotte Roderique. "In the last 15 years, (96-30) has made it easier to work with state agencies. A drawback: maybe the state people aren't as informed about the bill as they should be, but program by program, it is different."

"There is a disconnect," Kitzhaber said, "between people on the ground and agency directors."

Other summit themes included Tribes' unsuccessful efforts, over almost 20 years, to fund a state position dedicated to Tribal Education. The position exists, but was defunded in the early 1990s, said Tribal member and Tribal Education Department Manager April Campbell. What that means for Tribes, she said, is "we're missing out on having a voice in state policies that affect our Native student population."

The position would keep Tribes informed as the Oregon Education Department considers policies affecting Tribes, specifically, said Kennedy, "an Indian Education specialist at Oregon Department of Education that would assist in revising and implementing the American Indian/Native Alaskan Indian Education State Plan (for Oregon)."



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy listens as Gov. John Kitzhaber, right, speaks during the 13th annual Tribal-State Government to Government Summit at Chinook Winds Casino Resort in Lincoln City on Tuesday, Nov. 15.



Tribal Council member June Sherer carries the Grand Ronde Tribal flag in the opening ceremony of the 13th annual Tribal-State Government-to-Government Summit at Chinook Winds Casino Resort in Lincoln City on Tuesday, Nov. 15.

"Unfortunately, with Oregon in this difficult budget situation, it always comes down to funding," said Grand Ronde Tribal member and Tribal lobbyist Justin Martin. "While everyone agrees about the importance of this position, we also know and understand the economic problems that Oregon is facing. We are hopeful that at some point in the immediate future our cooperative efforts with the Department of Education will lead to a creative solution to get something done."

Health care is another area of concern to Tribes, Kennedy said.

"We appreciate the work Dr. (Bruce) Goldberg (director of the Oregon Health Authority) has done, but it is a two-tier program. It must allow Tribes to be on equal footing," Kennedy said Tribes are looking for "one vehicle for compacting dollars available for Tribes. Pass through dollars should be treated as pass through."

Tribal leaders brought lists detailing successes and failures in their Tribal relations with state agencies.

On the Oregon Health Plan redesign, Kennedy reported in the

list she submitted to Kitzhaber. "State held a committee with stakeholders, community partners, but Tribes were not included in the initial conversation and committee until well into the process after Coordinated Care Organizations were decided on. The Tribes didn't get to express any concerns or issues until after decisions had already been made. Because a large number of Natives have OHP and also use Tribal facilities, it does have a large impact to Tribes. It would be helpful when the state has conversations, planning, coordinating and collaborations that Oregon Tribes are consulted and brought in from the beginning."

"There seems to be a clear priority to use federal funds for state projects," said Kennedy. "Tribal funds come from those federal dollars; we'd like to see a portion go to Tribes."

In that regard, Kennedy reported, "Our experience with state parks has been less favorable. We have applied twice to the state Recreational Trails Program to develop trails open to the public. There seems to be a clear priority to use

the funds for state projects. ... The RTP funds come from federal dollars. We would like to see a portion of those funds going to Tribes."

"It is critical," Kitzhaber said, "that we rethink our models and make sure they still make sense."

On the other hand, there are bright spots throughout the government-to-government relations.

Lincoln County Commissioner Terry Thompson said that the county's relationship with the Siletz Tribe is "one of the greatest relationships."

When getting started years ago, Thompson said, "We had to find common ground, so one of the first things they did was take negativity out of the room. One of the big steps forward, we took the lawyers out of the room."

Cottage Grove Mayor Gary Williams, who said his people had "only been in Oregon for six generations," described that city's work with Natives as "incremental, small steps," such as "naming streets with Native American names."

Many Tribal leaders had high praise for the Oregon Department of Transportation in its government-to-government responsibilities. In fact, Kennedy reported to Kitzhaber that she thought it would

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