

Final informational session to be held April 16

ELECTION continued from front page

June 6.

A similar event came later in the day in Eugene at Lane Community College's longhouse.

The final informational session for Tribal members will be held on Wednesday, April 16, in Grand Ronde at approximately 6 p.m. in the Governance Center following that day's Tribal Council meeting.

The first proposed amendment removes the oversight role that the Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, has held over Tribal constitutional amendment elections. If the amendment passes, oversight of and approval for future constitutional amendments will both become Tribal responsibilities. The BIA supports the amendment.

"The BIA's role," said Acting Superintendent Arthur E. Fisher, who also is the Election Board Chair and Realty Officer for the federal agency's Siletz Agency Office, "is to make elections as objective as possible and as inclusive as possible."

Fisher said that removing oversight from the understaffed Siletz Agency Office will eliminate a negative element from the process.

The thinking behind the change also came because years ago the Tribe did not have the administrative depth or experience to run a Tribal-wide vote. Today, the Tribe has both the depth of personnel and experience to do the work on its own.

Finally, BIA oversight has required the Tribe and its members to follow two sets of regulations for different kinds of elections: For Tribal Council elections, run and

overseen by the Tribe, and constitutional amendments, run by the Tribe but overseen by the BIA.

The differing rules mean two sets of voter registrations. Two registrations have meant more mistaken names and addresses. Tribal Council hopes that a single registration will translate into more Tribal voter registrations and greater participation in future elections.

In the last Grand Ronde constitutional election, said Angela Ramirez, administrative assistant for the Siletz Agency Office, 40 to 50 registration packets sent to Tribal members were returned undeliverable.

The April 12 meetings also marked opening day for BIA registrations. At the end of the Portland meeting, where registration packets were available for those attending, the BIA logged six of 3,976 potential registrations.

Called an expansion of Tribal sovereignty, the amendment comes from an advisory vote of Tribal members in 2009.

"That's how long it took to study the issue," said Giffen. "It doesn't change a lot, but taking the BIA out of these elections expands Tribal sovereignty."

Even with passage of the amendment, much BIA oversight will remain. The agency continues to have approval responsibilities for many trust land functions, including fee-to-trust land designations. Currently, BIA oversight covers some 11,000 Tribal acres, Fisher said. Also still under BIA supervision are per capita plans, fire suppression, forestry and social services activities.

The second proposed amendment would set term limits for future

Tribal Council members. In 2010, a survey of Tribal members found more than 75 percent of those providing input supported term limits. At that time, the survey respondents favored limits of two terms.

The amendment, however, allows three-term limits with a year off required before a Tribal member may run again for three more consecutive terms. The amendment would not affect those currently on Tribal Council who have already served more than three consecutive terms.

The limits were arrived at, said Giffen, by taking an average of the length of time Tribal Council members have served since Restoration.

If passed, terms of the amendment will take effect for the Tribal Council election held after the amendment has become law.

Here are important dates for the process:

April 9: BIA voter registration packets were sent to all Tribal members who will be 18 or older on July 19.

May 9, at 4 p.m.: BIA registration packets must reach the Siletz Agency Office.

May 14: Proposed list of registered voters will be posted at various locations around the Tribal campus for review.

May 22: Official ballots will be sent to eligible BIA-registered voters.

May 27: End of the dispute period for names on the proposed list.

May 28: Final official list of BIA-registered voters will be posted.

Noon June 6: The election will be held; ballots must reach the Siletz Agency Office by noon.

To pass these amendments, 30

percent of BIA-registered voters must vote. Of those who vote, two-thirds must vote in favor.

More information is available on the Tribal website and at the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Siletz Agency Office by calling 1-800-323-8517, ext. 221 or 223.

The events in Portland and Eugene were lightly attended, but those who attended were engaged with the process.

"I appreciate the opportunity of having the information available to the Tribal members who came," said Mike Portwood of Tigard. He was concerned, however, that removal of BIA's neutral oversight will make it easier for Tribal Council to alter the Tribal Constitution.

"I'm going to continue thinking about the positives and negatives of ending BIA oversight," he said, and added, "I can't think of any downside to the term limits amendment."

Senior Staff Attorney Daneen Aubertin Keller noted that those in attendance asked "really insightful questions." Those in attendance were engaged, she said. "I only wish we had more people."

Also in attendance were Tribal Council members June Sherer, Jon A. George and Ed Pearsall. From the Grand Ronde Tribal Attorney's Office were Greene, who walked the group through a PowerPoint program that also was handed out in a printed packet, and Keller, who specializes in election issues for the Tribe.

In addition, Tribal Council Executive Coordinator Stacia Martin and temporary Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi also attended. George offered the invocation. ■

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