

'There is a lot of need for education'

GOVERNOR continued
from front page

attend the Sept. 13 opening gala for the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center.

Kitzhaber was then presented a packet that included Tribal history and an outline of Tribal concerns to be discussed.

Leno touched on two Tribal educational efforts – its Tribal history curriculum for fourth-graders that was taught as a pilot project last school year in the Willamina School District and the Spirit Mountain Community Fund-funded Chalkboard Project analysis of how Native students are performing in Oregon's public schools.

Leno said the Tribally created curriculum taught to fourth-graders is an effort to “teach our children who they are and being proud of who they are so that they will want to stay in school.”

“There is a lot of need for education, and more needs for our Tribal kids,” Leno said, adding that the challenge is to keep Native children in school so that they can eventually take advantage of significant Tribal assistance available for post-secondary education.

The Chalkboard Project findings, which discovered a high absenteeism rate among Native students, indicated a great need among Tribal students attending predominantly rural Oregon public schools.

Kitzhaber said the upcoming state budget includes another full-time employee in the state Department of Education to help Indian Education Specialist April Campbell, who is a Grand Ronde Tribal member and former head of the Tribe's Education Department.

He also said he supports efforts to help Oregon's Tribal governments combat Native student absenteeism and disseminate Tribal curriculums to a larger audience.

Leno said the Grand Ronde Tribe is moving beyond its cooperative agreements with Willamina and talking with educational representatives from Lebanon, Banks and Tillamook about using the Tribal history curriculum.

“We want to teach teachers about us, and not just us, but about all of the Tribes in Oregon,” Leno said.

George said that he wanted to make sure that Kitzhaber understands that the Grand Ronde Tribe is not trying to disseminate its specific curriculum statewide, but that it wants to encourage through Community Fund grants that the eight other federally recognized Tribes in Oregon create their own curriculums that could be used in nearby school districts.

George also wanted to know how the state can hold parents accountable regarding chronic student absenteeism.

Kitzhaber said the state Department of Education only starts tracking absenteeism in the sixth or seventh grades, which can be a problem since the educationally harmful habit starts much earlier. “This is a family issue,” he said, adding that he favors beefing up state invest-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

From left, Tribal Council members Denise Harvey and Kathleen Tom, Tribal Council Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr., Tribal Council member Jon A. George, Gov. John Kitzhaber, Tribal Council Secretary Toby McClary, Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno, and Tribal Council members Ed Pearsall and Cheryle A. Kennedy gathered for a group picture in the Governance Center Atrium after their meeting on Monday, Aug. 4.

ment in early childhood education to save money in the future.

Regarding public safety concerns, Leno briefed Kitzhaber on the Tribe's substantial investment in building the fire station on Grand Ronde Road and paying salaries of West Valley Fire District employees who are stationed there. In addition, Leno detailed the creation and staffing of the Grand Ronde Police Department, which is now responsible for public safety in much of Grand Ronde, including non-Tribal areas, since the cash-strapped Polk County Sheriff's Office ended its public safety agreement with the Tribe beginning July 1.

“We put a huge amount of money into this situation. Of course, we believe it to be part of our sovereignty to have our Tribal Court and our police,” Leno said. “We're proud of the fact that we have a police department, but we cover everybody, and we get no help. We're funding all of this. ... This is a burden on us. Whatever dollar we take away to protect the whole community is a dollar we're taking away from our membership.”

“We're in this megabucks,” Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy added, “but it is important to us.”

Kitzhaber said the state is looking to increase funding for the Oregon State Police, in part to help the economically distressed counties in southwestern Oregon that have seen their public safety budgets slashed substantially because of reduced timber revenues. He said he supports developing a partnership where the state, counties and Tribes can develop cooperative agreements on public safety.

“The old system is not working very well,” Kitzhaber said. “At the

end of the day, we're having a real problem with service delivery.”

Kitzhaber added that pooling resources probably will be necessary because “no magic pot of money will suddenly appear. We have to do a better job of leveraging the resources that we have.”

Leno then switched to the Red Hills controversy in which the Warm Springs Tribe is attempting to purchase land near Lafayette in Yamhill County – smack dab in the middle of Grand Ronde's ceded lands – as part of the Bonneville Power Administration's Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program and with the cooperation of the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

“They can buy 200 or so acres, but that doesn't mean that they buy the history and the culture of it,” Leno said about the Warm Springs effort. “They could dig up artifacts; they could dig up human remains. They're Grand Ronde, not Warm Springs. They're our people.”

Leno said the Grand Ronde Tribe also is concerned the Warm Springs Tribe will attempt to assert treaty rights, which could lead to putting land into trust and then possibly building a new casino.

“We are extremely distressed,” Kennedy said. “This is a violation of the Willamette Valley Treaty. For BPA and ODFW to put the treaty aside and put another Tribe in the middle of our treaty lands ... that is unacceptable.”

Tribal Attorney Rob Greene said that the Tribe had heard that Kitzhaber's office was endorsing the purchase and pushing the BPA process forward without resolving Grand Ronde's concerns about encroachment.

Kitzhaber said he was not consulted on the issue and will look into it. “I don't know where the pressure is coming from, but I will find out,” he said.

With time running out, Leno quickly touched on two other issues – the Tribe's desire to see all veterans at the Tribal Health & Wellness Center and Grand Ronde's continued support of Kitzhaber's gaming policy of one casino per Tribe on reservation land.

Kitzhaber briefly talked about his campaign against Republican Dennis Richardson for a fourth term. He said he knows that the Koch brothers will be spending money in Oregon to support Republican candidates and they will almost certainly target the Cover Oregon website troubles.

However, Kitzhaber said, he and Richardson have different views on how they envision Oregon and that he hopes the Grand Ronde Tribe will support him again.

To close out the meeting, Tribal Council members congratulated Kitzhaber on that day's announcement that he and his longtime partner Sylvia Hayes had become engaged.

“It is an honor to have you at our table,” Leno said as the meeting concluded.

Other Tribal Council members who attended were Kathleen Tom, Denise Harvey, Toby McClary, Jack Giffen Jr. and Ed Pearsall.

Tribal staff who attended included lobbyist Justin Martin, Acting General Manager Chris Leno, Police Chief Al LaChance, Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor, Education Department Manager Eirik Thorsgard and Tribal Council Executive Coordinator Stacia Martin. ■