

# Walden makes first visit to Grand Ronde

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Congressman Greg Walden, who represents the largest area of any Oregon member of the House of Representatives and is the state's lone Republican in Congress, made his first visit to Grand Ronde on Friday, Nov. 20.

"It's good to get a check mark next to getting out here," Walden said to seven Tribal Council members in attendance – Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. and members Chris Mercier, Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Denise Harvey, Brenda Tuomi and Ed Pearsall.

Walden said he delivered a speech in Portland earlier in the day, which provided him and a staff member an opportunity to visit Grand Ronde.

Walden lives in Hood River and represents all of eastern Oregon and portions of southern Oregon. He has served in the House of Representatives since 1999.

"We're really glad that you had an opportunity to come out and visit," Leno said, who then asked what is occurring in Washington, D.C., that might affect the Tribe.

Walden briefed Tribal Council on the recent passage of a bill that would keep Tribes from having to abide by U.S. Department of Labor rules, maintaining Tribal sovereignty. He also briefly discussed forestry issues on federal lands and referenced the massive Canyon Creek Fire that occurred this summer in his district near John Day.

"We need more active forest management and be better stewards of the federal forests," Walden said. "It's awful what happened and will



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Congressman Greg Walden shakes hands with Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi during a meeting with Tribal Council in Grand Ronde on Friday, Nov. 20. It marked the first time that Walden, who has served in the House of Representatives since 1999, has visited the Tribe.**

happen."

Walden then asked Tribal Council members what was on their minds, which led to a discussion of how well the Tribe maintains its natural resources, as well as an in-depth discussion of proposed amendments to the Grand Ronde Reservation Act and why the Grand Ronde Tribe opposes a Siletz bill that would equate the Siletz Reservation with the historical Coast Reservation.

Leno said the Grand Ronde Tribe is currently negotiating with Tillamook County to accept approximately 1,200 acres of surplus forest land. The Tribe also has been able to increase its allowable cut on the Reservation from 6 million board

feet to 7 million board feet.

"We don't use herbicides on our Reservation and we've seen an increase in salmon returning," Leno said. "We're really proud of our natural resources."

"Surrounding communities are impressed with our management of our lands," Giffen said. "We're good stewards of the forests."

The Tribe's positive relationship with surrounding cities and counties led to a discussion of the proposed amendments to the Grand Ronde Reservation Act, which are back before Congress again.

The amendments would amend the Reservation Act to create a one-step process that would allow the Grand Ronde Tribe to take land within its original Reservation of more than 60,000 acres into trust as on-reservation land and once the land is taken into trust it would automatically become part of the Tribe's Reservation.

Currently, the Grand Ronde Tribe must apply to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for a fee-to-trust application when it purchases land. After the land is accepted into trust by the BIA, the Tribe then must amend its Reservation Act through congressional action for the land to be considered part of the Reservation.

The proposed amendments were re-introduced by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden in March. The Tribe has been working for more than six years to amend the Restoration Act. During the last Congress, the amendments were passed by the House, but did not get through the Senate before Congress adjourned.

In contrast, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene said, the Siletz bill attempts to broaden that Tribe's Reservation beyond Lincoln County, which was identified as the Siletz Tribe's homelands in its Restoration Bill.

"We were given Polk, Yamhill, and Tillamook counties and they were only interested in Lincoln County," Leno said. "We need to recognize what was given to us by Congress. What are they presenting that is bigger than a congressional act?"

Greene said the Siletz bill could change history since the Coast Res-

ervation was created for all western Oregon Tribes and not just the Siletz. He added that if the Siletz bill becomes law, it will create conflict between Tribes that could hamper economic development in Tillamook County.

"We have clear boundaries now," Greene said. "Let's stay with those boundaries. Otherwise, we will have a mess that we will have to deal with for years to come."

Leno added that the Siletz bill is opposed by both Yamhill and Tillamook counties, as well as the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians in southern Oregon.

"They are not parity," Greene said about the Grand Ronde and Siletz bills. "They are not the same sort of bill."

Leno said the Siletz bill also could create conflict between Tribes when it comes to artifacts and remains found in overlapping areas. "Remains might sit for years in boxes, waiting to be put away," he said.

Greene asked Walden to talk with Rep. Don Young of Alaska, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs, about the two bills when he returns to Washington, D.C.

Leno then segued to another issue: federal funding for Tribal police and how Terminated Tribes, such as Grand Ronde, do not receive monies for the very expensive job of operating a police department.

"There seems to be different rules for Terminated Tribes and regular Tribes," Leno said.

For instance, since Grand Ronde was terminated for 29 years, it was not federally recognized when some federal programs that provide funding to Tribes were created. And trying to get into those programs and their revenue streams now is proving difficult.

Greene added that the Tribe even was advised to withdraw its request for federal funding because a denial could be held against the Tribe in the future.

"If you are not able to apply, then they can say they are meeting demand," Walden said ruefully.

Leno also discussed the Tribe's recent purchase of the shuttered Multnomah Greyhound Park in Wood Village.

"We'll have to level it and are looking at it for a long-term return that will fund our endowments," Leno said.

Walden said the land is a prime piece of real estate within the Portland metro area.

The approximately 50-minute meeting ended with Mercier jokingly asking Walden, a fellow University of Oregon graduate, how the state can change its state nickname from the Beaver State to the Duck State.

Leno, an Oregon State University graduate, chuckled.

"Well, this has been most instructive and helpful," Walden said.

The Tribe gifted Walden a basket of items and an information packet about the Tribe's history and culture.

Also attending the meeting was Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin. ■

## 'I feel there are some great people here'

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clearly understands the professional aspect of it," said Leno. "I hope people are patient and cooperative with her."

"I feel there are some great people here. There are great resources available – everything is there," said Rowe. "Making the members healthier and more aware – that's exciting to me. There is a lot of opportunity for us to work together and to come together as a team and I think that that is the key to making things successful, so I'm really excited to work on that."

Rowe is married and has one adult son. She said she wants the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center to be a center of excellence.

"I feel that we are so primed," said Rowe. "Bringing it together will be exciting and I think it's going to be exciting for everybody here. It's not just accepting a new job for me, but accepting a job with so much riding on it. It's so

important. It's not just a job. This has so much more meaning in it."

Mercier said the clinic is moving ahead with an assessment plan that was created by former Interim Director Tal Moore. Mercier said staff has met with Tribal Council and have implemented many of the main recommendations in the assessment plan.

Mercier said Rowe has seen the document as a member of the Health Committee and that she is on board.

"Part of that is just getting back to the mission statement and the vision statement," said Mercier. "When we have new staff come on, we are training them on why we are here, what our purpose is, what our roles are and who our patients are."

Mercier said the business of health and wellness in Indian Country is unique and valued, and in Grand Ronde even more so.

"We've invested a lot in it, it's important to Tribal members," said Mercier. "There are not many Tribes out there that have done that." ■