

## Letters

### Dear *Smoke Signals*:

The upcoming constitutional amendment has sure got everyone's attention. We have those who are for it and those who are against it, and in a way I've never seen before. I, myself, have watched the videos where members are voicing their concerns, have read on Facebook where members and non-members do the same and have talked directly to members who are for it and who are not. For the most part many members are not in support of changing our Constitution.

I have one thought: If this constitutional amendment passes what becomes of the programs that are currently offered and how will it affect the current enrollment?

Let's face it, there's only so many grants we can apply for and currently do. We stretch every one of those dollars to the best of our ability. The Tribe funds some programs, but again there are only so many dollars to assist with. Sure, we have the casino, but with competition of another one being built on our back doorstep, do you really think we won't take a hit? It's my opinion we probably will.

Let me ask this, do you enjoy your medical, education, housing, Social Services programs, Elders benefit and per capita? Because if you do, and this amendment passes, you may not be receiving them. Granted those programs will still be intact, but it doesn't mean you'll receive them. Don't get me wrong, you might receive a little, but not to the full extent we all receive now. Instead your medical coverage will go down and chances of receiving a scholarship will be affected. Keep in mind there only so many dollars and many members want and need assistance toward their educational goals. There's only so many houses/apartments in the Housing Department. Social Services is only allotted so much; many programs are first-come, first-served. Elder's endowment can only support so many and per capita payments will go down.

No instead, it could be someone else, someone who isn't really a Grand Ronde Tribal member, but now is because of this amendment. Sure we have money in the bank, but we are not a rich Tribe when compared to others. Compared to some Tribes, we're still fairly new.

It's my opinion, if you want to make someone a Tribal member then you make my descendants one. At least they'll have Grand Ronde blood. If this amendment passes, some will be enrolled who have none while others who do are left out. How fair is that? It's ridiculous.

As far as the referendum, no. All that will do is give power to a few. It's totally absurd. Leave it as it is. Anything else is dangerous to our Tribe.

The parent on the poll amendment I agree with, but because this has been bundled I now have to vote "no." Effectively my voice has been quieted and that's not fair. Parent on the roll probably would have passed on its own merit, but there seems to be those who don't think I'm intelligent enough to vote on several amendments at one time. Instead, I have to vote across the board, yes for all or no for all. Again, I vote "no." What a shame for our Tribe and what an insult to me.

I was raised in Grand Ronde and lived there from the 1960s through the '80s. Even before Restoration, we took pride in who we were. We were Grand Ronde Indians! No other but Grand Ronde! I think of all those who have walked on from that period, and feel at peace knowing they wouldn't agree with what is happening. Instead, I believe in my heart they'd be crying out to stop it.

When I leave this world, when I am called home, I refuse to stand before my ancestors and answer to them why I think this constitutional amendment was right. Because it's not.

**Tammy C. Garrison**  
Roll #1669

### Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I am writing today because I have grown very concerned about the direction our current Tribal leaders are leading our Tribe. The majority of Tribal Council appear to me to be more concerned about opening up our enrollment for outside Native Americans to join the Tribe than they are concerned about the overall well-being of our current Tribe. My concerns are substantiated by the two proposed constitutional amendments and the manner in which the registration and election are being administered.

First, let me begin with the election, which used to allow a total of 90 days to register and vote. Tribal members are now given 21 days to register to vote in the upcoming election and 25 days to cast their vote, almost cutting the overall time for registering and casting votes in half. These timelines include the amount of time it takes to receive your paperwork in the mail and the amount of time it takes to return the paperwork in the mail.

Consequently, if a Tribal member is serving in the military overseas or living outside of the continental United States, it will be very possible that there is not enough time to either register or cast a vote. Our current majority on Tribal Council has chosen to cut the time for the election almost in half against the recommendations of the BIA and the Enrollment Board. Upholding a fair and unbiased election is always far more important than any perceived urgency to propose constitutional changes.

Our election process is the only way that Tribal members can have a fair say in the Tribe's future. Why would the majority not desire to ensure that all Tribal members who wish to cast a vote are given sufficient time to do so? If every Tribal member is not given ample time to cast a vote in an election, it is plainly and simply a form of censorship.

Now let me write about the amendments we are voting on, beginning with the proposed change to the definition of Grand Ronde blood. The

new definition will be changed to include all Indian blood derived from a direct ancestor who appears on the official Tribal membership roll from 1984 to 1999 as opposed to the 1983 Restoration Roll. This means that any descendant from an enrolled member may count the Indian blood of their enrolled parent's mother and father combined even though only one is a Grand Ronde ancestor. Personally, I do not agree that our Tribe should enroll people who do not have at least 1/16th Indian blood traced back to an enrolled Tribal member only. At what point will our Tribe become comprised with a majority of members with minimal blood lineage to the five Tribes of Grand Ronde and recognized Northwest bands? Will these new members care about the future of our Tribe or will they simply be here to collect all that they can until the well runs dry?

Next, I would like to address the proposed change to the requirements for initiatives, referendums and the calling of special General Council meetings. Is it necessary to reduce this requirement from 30 percent to 15 percent? Is 650 people, as opposed to 1,300, enough members to justify a proposal to create amendments to our Constitution, to recall previously approved changes by the majority of the membership, or to call for a special General Council meeting? I find this new number far too few to be given such great power over the entire membership. The Tribe and its leaders have far too many important tasks to perform to spend their time addressing organized efforts that do not reflect the overall mindset of the Tribe in general. In other words, expect a lot more elections requiring us to vote against changes to our Constitution that most of us feel are completely unnecessary.

Please join me by voting "no" on these proposed amendments in our upcoming election. Make sure to meet the stringent timelines that have been unfairly forced upon us. And while you're at it, make sure to let the Tribal Council, including the majority, know that you do not approve of these unwanted elections and the efforts to open up our Tribe to outside Indian blood.

**Brenda Gray**  
Roll #339

### Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I'm sure I won't be the only one to make a recommendation on the upcoming constitutional amendments. But unlike some of those people telling you to vote "no," I will provide my rationale based on fact, not wild speculation, rumors, exaggeration or statements like "our Tribe will be ruined." Those couldn't be further from the truth.

Please understand, I actually read the proposed amendments, attended a Q&A session and find both of these proposals long overdue and much needed within our Tribe.

For those of you on Facebook, I am an administrator for Grand Ronde Forum, a message board for our Tribal community. The attempts to misinform, scare and attack those supporting these amendments absolutely disgusts and saddens me. I hope for rational, fact-based debate on important Tribal issues, not childish arguments like presidential primaries.

Let me start with the low-hanging fruit: The amendments to lower the petitioning requirements on our General Council powers of initiative, referendum and the calling of special Council meetings. These are rights and powers we already possess as Tribal members, but they currently have such difficult requirements, needing 1,200-1,300 signatures, making them near impossible to meet. We barely have that many members vote in our Tribal Council elections!

As a Tribal member who wants to do more than just draw per cap checks and vote in Tribal Council elections, I like the idea of being able to propose our own Tribal laws and resolutions, or legally question those of Tribal Council. What is wrong with giving Tribal members a tool to make their own proposals and put them to a vote? Or to put a questionable law or resolution by Tribal Council to a vote? I am not comfortable with a system of government that provides absolute power to five members of Tribal Council, who can do whatever they want without explanation. These proposals are a step in the right direction. If you want more power as a Tribal member, then vote "yes" on these amendments. Personally, I can't believe anybody even opposes giving the Tribal membership more power, but the split on Tribal Council was 5-4.

On the enrollment amendment: I see this proposal as cleaning up the unintended consequences of the 1999 amendment that have hurt many Tribal families. This does not open the "floodgates," as many opponents have stated. Nor does it create split families. This was settled at the Portland Q&A session, when our Tribal attorneys, the ones who some Tribal Council swear by, acknowledged that no new split families will be created.

The amendment will mean a modest boost in our Tribal population. But they are people who should be Tribal members, who are descended from Grand Ronde ancestors, but have been disqualified by the technicalities of the 1999 amendment. Those ridiculous situations where one child is enrolled but the other is not, despite having the same biological parents, will be resolved.

I will be the first to admit the amendment doesn't go as far as it should. There are longer term problems, such as blood quantum, that will need to be addressed in the coming decades. But everyone should recognize that this is a positive step for our Tribe. Please join me in voting "yes."

**Bryan Mercier**  
Roll #1357