

Letters

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

First of all, I am voting “no” on the proposed amendments to our Tribal Constitution. I’m certain that many people already know how I will vote, but may not understand why. I will explain why I don’t believe these proposed amendments are in the best interest of the “entire membership of the Tribe.” I will follow the order from the handout from May 18, which I’m sure many, if not all, Tribal members have at least heard about if not seen.

1. Initiative and Referendum Petitions: This proposed amendment reduces the number of Tribal member signatures needed from one-third or 33 percent to 15 percent. The number of qualified voters from 30 percent to at least 20 percent. A vote of two-thirds of those who actually vote will still be required (if these members actually vote). The stated reason, from the five Tribal Council members who champion these proposals, is that it will reduce the number of members required to vote, which will also increase member participation if it passes.

While the number of members needed to vote is less, it could also cause great harm to the Tribe (and I hope it never happens) if only five unscrupulous Tribal Council members wanted to push something through. This sounds harsh, but if you think about it, it is entirely possible. What I find interesting is that Recall of a Tribal Council member is not specified; I have to wonder why. This is also a “right” of the entire membership, so why would the numbers needed not be reduced for this?

The number of Tribal member signatures needed for a General Council Special Meeting will drop from one-third or 33 percent to 15 percent, but also removes reference to the Secretary of the Interior’s regulations related to “initiative, referendum or recall” actions.

2. Enrollment Requirements: The proposed amendment changes the current requirements dramatically. While it removes the parent on the roll at time of birth and at time of application, it also changes the definition of Grand Ronde blood (to enroll). If passed, the amount of Grand Ronde blood will still be taken from an ancestor on the Restoration Roll, but will allow all “other Indian blood” as well. But, this only applies to Tribal members enrolled between Nov. 30, 1984, to Sept. 14, 1999. This will allow people who have been denied (because of blood quantum or other issues) to re-apply and qualify for membership.

If passed this will create two different classes of members. One class will be those who can use all their Indian blood, and those who can’t claim all their Indian blood. True, Grand Ronde Tribal members will nearly cease to exist and the Tribe could become one where the “other Native blood” is dominant, and would change who we are forever. I hope and pray that is not what you want for our Tribe; I know I don’t.

We were on the brink of changing the parent on the roll issues months ago and half of the Tribal Council believed it would go forward. However, those who now champion these proposed amendments voted down the needed resolution and basically “rewrote” it, which also created a huge delay. What may have occurred in January is happening now.

These proposed amendments have also created great unrest and animosity between those who (for whatever reason) want the proposed amendments to pass and those (like me) who don’t. From what I’ve seen and heard, those who want this to pass have mentioned greed, bigotry, racism and many other ugly things. Those of us who oppose the proposed amendments do not want the definition of Grand Ronde blood to change, create two different classes of members or change the requirements for constitutional elections. It’s that simple. Those who champion them have done everything in their power to try and ensure passage, including shortening the time frame from 90 days, which we have historically done, to less than 60 days.

It should never be “easy” to change our Tribal Constitution. It was established this way for a purpose; to bring only those things that must have a vote of the entire membership forward and not every time someone doesn’t like the way part of it reads.

This does not allow a “fair” constitutional election. There are Tribal members across the United States, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Australia. We also have Tribal members in other countries overseas and in the military. I would say that the majority of these folks will not be able to receive their registration packets, get them signed, back to the BIA for approval, get their ballot and get it back in time to be counted. About the only way I know of to get a ballot here in time would be “Next Day Air” or whatever other means there may be. Relying on straight mail delivery is not likely an option.

Why the rush? What difference could it make to allow the 90 days, especially when that was recommended not only by the BIA but also the Special Election Board? I have no idea, other than that’s what they want and they’re doing it.

I am only one person, but I feel so strongly about this that it has caused me a great deal of unrest. And I know there are many others who feel the same way.

So, I will ask each and every one of our Tribal members to please consider voting “no” on the proposed amendments.

Dakota Whitecloud
Roll #1587

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

Based on recent articles and letters in various issues of *Smoke Signals*, I hope that most Grand Ronde General Council members realize that a BIA-conducted constitutional amendments election is underway.

A voter registration packet was to be mailed to each adult member of the Tribe on Tuesday, May 17, 2016. The completed voter registration form is to be received at a post office box address in New Mexico on or before June 7, 2016. A return addressed envelope is provided in the packet.

The important thing right now is that all eligible Tribal members get registered for this BIA-conducted constitutional amendments election. If you do not register you will not be sent a ballot when they are mailed out on June 13, 2016.

This BIA-conducted election is in regard to two proposed amendments to the Tribe’s Constitution.

One of the proposed amendments has to do with the powers of the General Council membership. The other proposed amendment has to do with enrollment requirements to become a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon.

Both of these proposed amendments are being presented to the Tribal voters as “bundles,” which, according to Chris Mercier’s letter in the May 15, 2016, issue of *Smoke Signals*, is “when items that can be separated are combined into one vote.”

The proposed amendment regarding the powers of the General Council membership is really several parts. The important thing to know about this amendment has to do with reducing the number of signatures on a petition that would be needed to call for:

- An initiative to set forth a new proposed ordinance or resolution;
- A referendum to set forth a Tribal Council proposed or previously enacted ordinance or resolution;
- A special meeting of the General Council.

Presently, it takes the signatures of one-third (33 percent) of the General Council members on a petition for action to start to take place. The proposed percent is 15.

The interesting thing is the General Council’s power to present a petition for the recall of elected Tribal officials is not included in the proposed amendment and neither is the power to present a petition to amend the Tribe’s Constitution. Besides that, when have you ever heard of anyone even talk about doing an initiative, a referendum or wanting to do a petition to have a special meeting of the General Council, especially when the Tribal Council can call for a special meeting of the General Council with one week’s notice?

The other thing I would like to note is that presently there is no way for the members of the General Council to have access to the names and addresses of our 3,800 or more adult Tribal members so that a petition could be circulated. So to me everything presented in this proposed amendment is for naught and is a waste of our time and Tribal dollars to even be voting on.

Needless to say, I will be voting “no” on the bundled amendment regarding the powers of the General Council membership. I encourage others to do the same.

The other proposed amendment that has to do with enrollment requirements to become a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon. This has been written about a lot on social media (Facebook).

For those who are not on social media, this amendment consists of two or three changes depending on how a person looks at it.

Currently, a person has to have “a parent who was a member of the Tribe at the time of the applicant’s birth and who, unless deceased, is a member of the Grand Ronde Tribe at the time the applicant files an application for enrollment.”

Also, the current definition of Grand Ronde blood is “all Indian blood derived from a direct ancestor whose name validly appears on the official Tribal membership roll prepared under the Grand Ronde Restoration Act.”

This proposed enrollment requirements amendment would remove the parent requirement and add additional words to the current definition of Grand Ronde blood. Those additional words are “or the official Tribal membership roll prepared by the Tribe between Nov. 30, 1984, and Sept. 14, 1999; provided that such roll may be corrected by the Tribal Council in accordance with the Tribal Enrollment Ordinance.”

In 2011, Tribal members voted on a bundled enrollment requirements amendment that had to do with the parent on a roll requirement and the definition of Grand Ronde blood and a couple of other things. Tribal voters rejected that “all or nothing” bundled amendment by 54 percent. At that time critics objected to the bundled approach, wanting to vote on each proposed change separately. I feel that the majority of Tribal voters still feel the same way today.

Without getting into all of the pros and cons of the current proposed enrollment requirements amendment, I want to say that I feel that each proposed change to our Tribe’s enrollment requirements needs to be voted on separately. Let each proposed change stand or fall on its own merits.

Because of the “all or nothing” bundled approach regarding our enrollment requirements, I will be voting “no” on the proposed enrollment requirements amendment just as I did in 2011. I encourage others to do the same.

The bottom line for me with this BIA-conducted constitutional amendments election and in any constitutional amendment election is: No bundles! Let each proposed change stand or fall on its own merits.

Leroy Good
Roll #892