

Letters

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

Why I will be voting “no” on both issues on the upcoming constitutional amendment.

I would like to say that I am writing this as a very concerned Tribal member, not as a council member. Hopefully many of you have registered to vote by now and will receive your ballot soon. I still have a lot of concerns as in my opinion there was not enough information made available to make this big of a decision for our Tribe’s future.

The idea of reducing the percentage of voters to allow more things to be brought forward by the members is not as good as it sounds. It’s been said it will give members more voice in what is going on, but you still have to have two-thirds to pass it. In my opinion, it is just spending money and time. If members are frustrated with the current constitutional amendment and the mistakes happening, just imagine doing these two, three or four times a year, which you as a member would have to register each time for each BIA election.

What we should have done is council keep working on the language that we have been doing as a combined council and waited until it was complete before putting it out for a vote. This would have given the members the authority by Constitution to have a voice in economic development and the earned interest on the endowments. In the best interest of the Tribe and members, I urge you to vote “no” on both issues put before you.

In looking at the enrollment piece, I have to wonder why the enrolled members of the Tribe that do meet the current enrollment criteria are being called greedy when they are just voicing their opinion on what is best for their Tribe and leaving their Constitution alone as it stands. Perhaps some could say the folks who want to change the Constitution to get enrolled are considered greedy. Also, I have to ask what about the people out there who have 1/32nd all Grand Ronde blood?

In closing, maybe we should remember the ones who raised us and taught us about being Grand Ronde Natives. They were not reading it out of a book; they lived it. There was a saying back in the day that I still feel is true today. Either you are Grand Ronde, or you are not. That is what I believe people are saying when they vote “no.”

Reyn Leno

Roll #453

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I will be voting “no” on the proposed enrollment constitutional amendment for the following reasons. Please consider all the facts and make an informed decision.

1. The proposed language was brought forward after only one Tribal Council work session. I believe this is unfinished work.
2. Neither the Enrollment staff nor the Enrollment Board were asked to participate in developing this language.
3. The election process is compromised. The time frame was shortened to 60 days due to the BIA not having resources to dedicate. There will be an overlap of this election with our Tribal Council elections.
4. This proposal is bundled thus does not allow the voice of the membership to vote on each issue independently.
5. There has not been enough due diligence to understand the possible impacts.
6. There are no controls in place to limit the number of enrollments per year.

A recent concern that Tribal members have shared with me is that our Tribe is self-terminating and they believe this amendment will help to solve this.

I understand the concern that many Tribal members and families are near the end of their blood quantum. I agree that our Tribe will need to address self-termination. This proposed amendment was never meant to be a solution for our self-termination. This amendment clearly focuses on Tribal membership during specific dates. When we begin the work to address self-termination we need to look at the entire membership.

There is a great deal of work that needs to be done to develop a strategy and implement changes to address self-termination of our Tribe. There needs to be an understanding of our Tribe’s growth. We need to look at what other Tribes have done. What has worked for them and what has not worked for them. We need to consider what has not been tried. There needs to be meetings with the membership to discuss the data and options. The path that we take needs to be comprehensive and well-planned. Our membership needs to be fully informed and guide the path that we choose to take.

Tonya Gleason-Shepek

Roll #1282

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Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I will make this short and sweet. Please vote “yes” on the upcoming constitutional amendments. Both will make a positive difference in the lives of your fellow Tribal members.

Enrollment requirements: Many Tribal families remain tormented by the 1999 amendment. The proposed amendment addresses those “unintended consequences,” like split families, blood lines ending prematurely and the general inconsistencies that have created a class system in Grand Ronde. I don’t believe some families somehow hold a higher status than others, or are more deserving. It should not matter whether your ancestors left the Reservation, by necessity or by choice, to improve their lives or whether they stayed. Historically our Tribe had numerous rolls and records that keep track of their members. Why should we take just one and say that is the “one true roll” and the descendants the “true Grand Ronde”? There is a word for that: Elitism.

Initiative, Referendum, and Calling of Special Meetings: I’ll be honest. This amendment truly excites me. We are finally giving our members a realistic way to exercise rights that have been in the Constitution since our Tribe was restored. In my short time as a Tribal Council member and before then even, Tribal members have always wanted a voice, and that has been dangled before them like a carrot during elections, but very rarely ever made good on. This is a legitimate change for the good. The initiative allows members to advance their own issues.

Referendum allows them to rescind a decision we make as Tribal Council. That could mean a decision I make gets overturned. But if I am that out of touch with the membership, then, yes, Tribal members should have a means to undo a decision.

Thank you for your time.

Brenda Tuomi

Roll #1438

Dear *Smoke Signals*:

I was barely a teenager when our Tribe was restored. My grandmother, Margaret Provost, and my mother, Jackie Many Hides, spent countless hours working on Restoration, and while I understand how important the work they were doing at the time, every year since then has reminded me how fortunate our Tribe is, and how lucky we are to be Grand Ronde Tribal members.

I attended college, earned both a bachelor’s and master’s degree, and not burdened with as much debt as many of my non-Tribal classmates. Those who really know me can vouch for how vital the Tribal health plan was to me years ago. More importantly, I grew up around the rich cultural history and traditions of our ancestors, much of this knowledge passed down to me by my mom, Jackie Many Hides, while growing up. This Tribe is as much a part of me as I am of it. More so, in fact since I spent much time in Grand Ronde while growing up and until recently choose to spend my adult years living there.

The question I am asking myself is: If a person had ancestral connections to this Tribe, why wouldn’t they want to be a member? And, more importantly, why would we deny these people? I read through the letters last issue telling me to vote “no” on these constitutional amendments. As somebody who lived in the Grand Ronde area for many years, I couldn’t help but notice some letters were from people who definitely were not involved with this Tribe in the 1980s, back when we had so very little. The benefits are nice, as I have already mentioned, but is the fear of having to share those worth keeping people out who really should be members? I don’t think so. In fact, I remember there was a time that there was a desperate search for Tribal members to inform them of the Restoration efforts and promises of a better day once the Tribe was restored, a path to self-sufficiency.

As a Tribal parent I would be fighting for justice too if my son had been unable to enroll, particularly if his parents are both Tribal members and his blood quantum should be sufficient. I am fortunate to be a part of that post-1999 amendment elite class. But I don’t want elite classes in this Tribe, because that is not the Grand Ronde I grew up in. I am voting “yes.”

Regarding the other amendment, the Initiative, Referendum & Calling of Special meetings, I can’t help but vote “yes” because none of the “vote no” reasons were at all persuasive. There are other parts of this Constitution that could be worked on that I agree with. However, over the years I’ve watched the Tribal Council grow more powerful, but haven’t seen a similar growth in authority for the Tribal members.

These powers were put in the Constitution for a reason, because our Tribe was meant to be a democracy, one that is not always dependent on the nine elected members of Tribal Council. I’ve seen Tribal Council go through power struggles, and at their best they are an effective body of leaders who get things done, and at their worst a council who fights with one another and looks after their own while neglecting what is best for the greater good of the whole Tribe. We, the general membership, when organized, should have the right to advance our own issues or reconsider those of our governing body. As the Constitution is presently written, I’d say our hands are tied too tightly. This amendment is the opportunity to fix that. For those reasons, I am voting “yes.”

Just for the record, this is the first time I’ve voiced my opinion politically through the *Smoke Signals* publication. But I feel strongly that these are positive changes for this Tribe that future generations will be grateful for.

Camille Mercier

Roll #1982