

Grand Ronde leaders attend annual summit

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

LINCOLN CITY – Tribal Council Vice Chair Cheryle A. Kennedy was among the nine Oregon Tribal leaders who welcomed about 200 people to the 17th annual State-Tribal Government Summit held Wednesday, Dec. 7, at Chinook Winds Convention Center in Lincoln City.

Kennedy joined eight other Tribal leaders to welcome elected state legislators, state department heads and their employees, and Tribal staff members to the event, which had the theme of “Ties That Bind.”

“For Native people, in ancient times we sat around campfires and the leadership and the people talked,” Kennedy said about the day’s theme during her welcoming address. “They talked about how to care for their people, how to protect their people, how to manage their village. They talked about those things that were good for the people. It was a very organized way of life that we lived and enjoyed.

“It was always foremost to look after your people, to take care of them. ... Through that era is what I believe to be the beginnings of meaningful conversation and dialogue among others. That’s the kind of thing that I would hope these consultations represent here today. That’s it’s not just an exercise of coming together ... but to embrace in its entirety the way of dialoguing and really looking through the eyes of our hearts in how we can make these things happen.

“I believe that we are going back to the way we used to do when Tribes sat around their campfires and we dialogued and really listened to one another. And we take to heart and try to find ways of resolving issues and minimizing barriers. ... It’s very important that when you ask a question, the answers lie in many different areas and they all need to be considered.”

Put on by the Legislative Commission on Indian Services, the annual summit is an opportunity for Tribal leaders and employees to educate the never-ending revolving door of state officials and employees on the nine Oregon Tribes and their sovereignty.

Karen Quigley, executive director of the Legislative Commission on Indian Services, told attendees that during her many years in state government that the most misunderstanding occurs when the state forgets Tribal sovereignty either inadvertently or intentionally and fails to consult on matters affecting Tribes.

Many at the summit cited the Standing Rock Sioux situation regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota as an extreme example of what can occur when governments – state and federal – fail to consult with affected Tribal Nations.

“Tribal ties to the land and waters



Photos by Michelle Alaimo



Elizabeth Furse, a former Oregon member of Congress, holds up a copy of the U.S. Constitution, which she always carries on her, during her luncheon speech at the 17th annual State-Tribal Government Summit held at Chinook Winds Convention Center in Lincoln City on Wednesday, Dec. 7.

of Oregon go back 15,000 years,” Quigley said. “Something the state needs to remember is that the past matters (to Tribes). Think about those 15,000 years before acting.”

To reiterate Tribal history in Oregon, the morning session featured Dr. Dennis Jenkins of the Museum of Natural and Cultural History at the University of Oregon, who spoke about his archaeological research at the Paisley Caves in central Oregon during the presentation titled “The Past Matters: Archaeology Preserves Oregon’s History.”

Jenkins’ findings show that human beings have lived in what is now Oregon for at least 14,500 years. The original residents were generally related through DNA testing of coprolite – fossilized dung – to Siberians/Asians and modern Native Americans.

Jenkins said the Paisley Caves are the oldest settlement ever found in the Americas and the items found were preserved because of the dry climate.

“You will never find another Paisley Caves,” he said.

The summit started with an opening ceremony that included Grand Ronde resident Dennis Kleffner carrying in the Grand Ronde flag and Warm Springs member Carlos Calica giving the invocation.

Siletz Tribal Chair Delores Pigsley welcomed attendees and Ben Souede, Gov. Kate Brown’s general counsel, performed the duties of master of ceremonies since Brown was unable to attend because of conflicting memorial services for former Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers, who walked on Nov. 29.

Tribal Council Vice Chair Cheryle A. Kennedy gives a welcome address during the 17th annual State-Tribal Government Summit held at Chinook Winds Convention Center in Lincoln City on Wednesday, Dec. 7. Next to Kennedy is Burns Paiute Tribal Chair Joe DeLaRosa, middle, and Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians Tribal Board of Directors member Tom Cox waiting to give their welcomes.

In a video presentation, Brown said that governing takes “mutual trust, respect and understanding” and that she hopes the annual State-Tribal summit fosters that between the state and Oregon’s Tribes.

Brown met with Tribal leaders the night before during a dinner that was attended by Kennedy.

Souede said one of his other roles in the Brown administration is to act as the liaison with Oregon’s nine Tribes.

“The Governor’s Office recognizes that a lot of the value of today is that you are all here in the same room together at the same time,” Souede said.

Souede then read the Oregon statute that requires the Governor’s Office to annually hold a summit between Tribal representatives and state employees to “work together to achieve mutual goals.”

“We are here to satisfy both the words and spirit behind that statute,” Souede said. “I don’t know how much time you have spent reading the Oregon Revised Statutes ... I have spent too much ... but take my word for it, working together to achieve mutual goals may be the most positive, hopeful and productive language in the entire Oregon code.”

Souede said now is a good time to remember those words, citing the takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County by armed outsiders, which damaged Burns Paiute cultural resources, and the Standing Rock Sioux situation.

“That is not how we do things here,” Souede said. “We are committed mutually to improving relationships and improving the lives of all of our peoples together.”

In addition to Kennedy, Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Kathleen George, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, Acting TERO Director John Mercier and Cultural Resources Historic Preservation

Manager Briece Edwards attended the summit.

Former Grand Ronde Education Department Manager April Campbell, who is the Indian Education adviser with the state Department of Education, also attended with her supervisor, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Salam Noor.

Luncheon speaker at the summit was Elizabeth Furse, a former Oregon member of Congress who spoke about Tribal sovereignty and the importance of consultation.

Furse, brandishing a copy of the U.S. Constitution, said she wanted to send out a warning to state agencies and their employees that lack of coordination and meaningful consultation with Tribes can lead to the fiasco that occurred in North Dakota.

“If those Tribes had been consulted, if they had known enough ... yeah, millions of dollars have been spent, but the Tribal people were not listened to,” Furse said.

“All state agencies have to be aware of, and perhaps you probably are, that states have no jurisdiction over Tribes unless the federal government has specifically transferred that jurisdiction. States are less sovereign than Tribes.”

Citing a case where the state of Washington banned net fishing of steelhead without consulting Tribes and in violation of several treaties, she advised state employees that they do not want to be responsible for violating the U.S. Constitution and federal-Tribal treaties and put the state into federal court.

“My word is a warning,” Furse said. “As state agencies, be sure that you are meticulous. ... I think the thing I am most concerned about, particularly because of the Lakota situation, is how can we get into such trouble by not doing proper consultation with the Tribe that is most affected. ... It is very important to say that you have this awesome responsibility to make sure that what you do does not violate in any way the federal trust responsibility and Tribal treaty rites.”

After lunch, state agency directors took the stage to offer comments on how they incorporate Tribal input into their agency’s work and then the summit ended earlier than scheduled to allow attendees to leave in anticipation of freezing rain and snow that occurred regionally on Thursday, Dec. 8.

Another unplanned running theme throughout the day was Native concerns about the incoming Trump administration.

Furse expressed her concerns and Warm Springs Chairman Austin Greene Jr. said there is “great uncertainty” in Indian Country about Trump’s potential policies.

“Overall it was a very special day and one of the best summits ever,” Quigley said. “Everyone appeared engaged and interested in the leaders’ remarks, the presentations, panels and, perhaps most importantly, the time together. I really loved people coming up and telling me that they were at ‘the best table.’ They had met so many new Tribal and state folks and had great conversations.” ■