

# Tribal Council chair testifies before Oregon Legislature

By Dean Rhodes  
Smoke Signals editor

SALEM – Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno testified before two Oregon legislative committees on Thursday, Feb. 9, in support of bills that would make funding available to Tribal governments for construction and restoration of memorials honoring veterans and direct the state Department of Education to develop curriculum relating to the Native American experience in Oregon.

Leno had early morning duty, testifying at 8 a.m. before the Oregon House’s Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee about House Bill 2405, which would make the state funding available for veterans memorials.

“HB 2405 is a solid step in the right direction,” Leno said.

However, that was not the only veterans-related issue that he tackled during his testimony.

Leno, who also is a member of the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee and is a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran, urged legislators to support the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs and to “utilize funding approved through Measure 96 above that which is currently budgeted.”

In November, Oregon voters overwhelmingly approved Measure 96, which dedicates Oregon Lottery funds to veterans. Veterans expected to get at least \$31 million during the next two years — \$13 million, which they received in the last two-year state budget, plus an additional \$18 million in lottery funds.

However, Gov. Kate Brown is proposing to give the Department of Veterans Affairs a total of \$21 million over two years, \$10 million less than the expected allocation.

“As far as the funding for veterans, I personally have gone through trying to get something done and I think here is one of the main problems: The mentality of you going to Veterans Affairs and trying to get some help and coming away feeling like you are a mere statistic needs to change. I am a U.S. Ma-



Reyn Leno

rine, served in Vietnam, so I’ve got a lot of knowledge of that,” Leno said, departing from his prepared statement.

“I think that Oregon

looks at being very proud of some of the things that they do, but we need to be proud of how we take care of our veterans. We need to set the bar, not the minimum. I think the people of Oregon spoke very clear on 96. It wasn’t ‘give ‘em here and take away there.’”

Rep. Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie) said that he agreed with Leno. “I agree with your analysis that Measure 96 was additive and not backfill. I suspect, sir, that if we were to go out on the street and ask the first 10 voters to pass by us they’d agree with us, too,” Witt said.

“Veterans are underserved,” Leno said. “More than two-thirds of the 350,000 veterans in Oregon are not receiving federal services and connecting to services is severely delayed.”

Leno said that the Grand Ronde Tribe has an agreement with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs that allows the Tribe to serve Native veterans through the Tribal Health & Wellness Center.

“By allowing Tribal clinics to provide health care to Native veterans, as well as be reimbursed for that care through the Department of Veterans Affairs, Tribes help Native veterans living in rural areas who cannot access or travel to the Veterans Affairs facilities in Portland, and whom in many cases prefer to be seen by a culturally sensitive provider.

“We ask that you also help to create legislation that allows Oregon Tribes to serve non-Native veterans who live in rural communities as either spouses or residents, but also face the same logistical problems in accessing health care.

“In closing, the Confederated

Tribes of Grand Ronde encourages support for HB 2405 and for all Oregon’s veterans and asks that you please prioritize programs that support Native and non-Native veterans and ensure that veterans programs are adequately funded.”

House Bill 2405 is sponsored by Rep. John Lively, a Democrat from Salem.

In the afternoon, Leno testified before the Senate Education Committee in support of Senate Bill 13, which also provides for professional development to teachers and administrators and requires school districts to implement the Native curriculum for students in kindergarten through 12th grade by the 2019-20 school year.

“There are nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon,” Leno said. “The history of our peoples, who have lived in Oregon since time immemorial, is significant for all Oregonians, but today is either ignored or poorly described in our schools. Most Oregon students learn more about the Sioux and Apaches than they do about the Umpqua, Molalla, Rogue River, Kalapuya or Chasta.

“Senate Bill 13 is an investment in Native American communities. The nine Tribes in Oregon have invested in local schools and we are still living with dire outcomes. For example, the current Native American graduation rate in Oregon is only 56.4 percent, and our children are not performing at grade level for many subjects, including basics like math and science. Many teachers are not prepared or equipped to discuss issues surrounding Indian Country, such as Tribal sovereignty, Tribal government land removal, Termination and Restoration. Some of the history is complicated and can be difficult to discuss.

“Grand Ronde has always recognized the importance of teaching Native history in Oregon. The Tribe has developed a history curriculum because of the need for historically accurate and culturally relevant curriculum in Oregon schools about Oregon’s first peoples. In 2014, this curriculum was provided to the Willamina School District and is now in 10 school

districts in Oregon.

“The Tribe, through Spirit Mountain Community Fund, has also made funds available for the other Oregon Tribes to develop Tribal specific history curriculums. It is the Tribe’s goal to build respect and understanding of Tribal history and culture, to give all youth the opportunity to learn about Oregon’s Native history, and to foster a culturally respectful representation of Native Americans.

“CTGR encourages support for Senate Bill 13 because it will have a significant impact on the lives and education of Native people and all Oregonians. It will also correct the years of omission from Oregon’s history curriculum of the nine sovereign Tribes. With this bill we can focus our efforts toward what is important – the education of our children.”

Leno added that he thinks teaching Native American curriculum in Oregon schools might help Native students remain in school.

The bill also would require the Department of Education to collaborate with Oregon Tribes in the development of curriculum and the professional development for school employees, as well as make funds available to Tribes to support collaboration efforts.

Senate Bill 13 was introduced at the request of Gov. Kate Brown for the Chief Education Office.

“I think we all know that we have a very rich Native history in this state,” Brown testified before the Senate Education Committee. “It has been preserved with great care by our Tribes and Native Americans across the state of Oregon. ... I see the purpose of Senate Bill 13 to develop curriculum that helps share the stories, triumphs, culture and contributions of Native Americans in Oregon.

“We believe that by incorporating more relevant and culturally responsive curriculum into our existing curriculum it will make greater strides in keeping students engaged. Native American history is Oregon history, and it is essential curriculum that will benefit all of our students.” ■

## West Valley Veterans Memorial Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ PH: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 DOB: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: Male / Female (circle) CTGR Tribal: Y / N (circle) If Tribal, roll# \_\_\_\_\_  
 DOE: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Entry \_\_\_\_\_  
 DOS: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Separation \_\_\_\_\_  
 Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Branch: \_\_\_\_\_ Honorable: Y / N (circle)  
 Deceased: Y / N (circle) DOD: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Burial \_\_\_\_\_

\*All applicants must submit a copy of their DD214. If applicant is deceased, a family member or spouse can submit a copy of their DD214. If you are a CTGR Tribal member please attach a copy of your Tribal ID. If you are non-Tribal please attach a copy of a bill/record with your name and address showing you had lived or now reside in Grand Ronde, Willamina or Sheridan. Please send application and all documents to: Grand Ronde Veterans SEB, 9615

Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, OR, 97347. If you have any questions, please call Steve Bobb at 503-876-3118.

Deadline is March 15, 2017

Any applications received after March 15, 2017, will be kept on file for inclusion to the Memorial in 2018.