

'What can we do to make life

LENO continued
from front page

not elected. Did you ever think about not trying again?

Leno: No. It was a different atmosphere then. It was the Tribe coming together. People were really, "What can I do for my Tribe?" And, of course, I lived here all of my life so what can I do for my Tribe? I had kids so I knew potentially whatever you decided would impact the future. I had three kids and hoping someday I would have grandkids, which I got eight now. So, no, I didn't. I was working. I was logging and the timber industry at that time was good. I guess I didn't have nothing to lose. And it was a lot different. You didn't have to spend \$5,000 on an election and you didn't have to make signs. Basically, you just had to get the support of the people and write your letter for *Smoke Signals* and that was pretty much it. There wasn't really a whole lot of cost to it.

***Smoke Signals:* You spent 16 years on Tribal Council as a member and the last five years as Tribal Council chair? Is there a discernible difference being the chair in trying to get your legislative agenda accomplished?**

Leno: I didn't really have a legislative agenda because my agenda was always about the membership. Come being here during Termination, living here in a very poor community, that was always on my mind right through the whole 21 years. What can we do to make life better for the membership? I look back at when logging was a very tough occupation and you lived from payday to payday. If there was a snowstorm in between, you had a very thin payday. It was very tough and we were raising three kids and you started planning in the spring for buying school clothes in the fall. There was a lot more to it than that. It was tough.

I think the only difference is basically you have to gather a decision from the council and deliver that whether you like the decision or whether you don't like the decision. You have to deliver that decision, but realistically you don't get a vote on it unless there is a tie in it. Your responsibility is changed from being "Hey, I think we should do this and here's my vote" to "OK, you eight have decided this and now I have to deliver this to whoever, whether it be in Congress, the governor or the membership." That's my responsibility now, to gather the decision of council and deliver it.

***Smoke Signals:* What do you think the biggest accomplishment(s) have been by the Tribe during your 21 years of service?**

Leno: Oh, wow, that's a long list. I think, looking back, I always tell people that I was very fortunate to have been here in the first probably 10 years of the casino time. We probably delivered more benefits in that time. Of course, I was the youngster on council, but we probably delivered more health care,



Smoke Signals file photo

Reyn Leno, serving as Tribal Council vice chairman at the time, testifies for the Tribe to get its ceremonial hunting rights restored during an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting in 2008. Testifying with him was then Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, right, and then Tribal Council Secretary Jack Giffen Jr. The Tribe received approval for its rights to be restored at this meeting.

per capita, Elder's pension and schools. I was here when we were only giving three scholarships. All of the different stuff ... per capita. We started pouring money into our endowments and very fortunate now that they just went over the \$700 million mark. Most important ones, I would say things like health care was a big one for me. Education, obviously, because it was something I looked at it was going to make a better life for somebody or their families. I think the sovereignty issues were always big for me. The regaining of our hunting rights, living here and hunting and everything. The fishing rights two years ago was a very emotional time when we went up and watched our fishermen. It was like watching the people I knew fishing on the rocks. Tribes don't get an opportunity to regain sovereignty, but Grand Ronde has regained two or three different types of things with sovereignty. It's pretty huge. I don't know if people really realize how big that is in Indian Country.

***Smoke Signals:* Do you have any regrets or disappointments? Things you would have liked to have seen accomplished that were not?**

Leno: One of them would have been health care. For a long time, and it goes back councils ... oh, we'll never be able to endow ... we got a health endowment, but we don't have a health plan to use that endowment or build that endowment to provide that health care. I think had we ever viewed it like we do today ... I believe now, and I have talked to Cheryle (A. Kennedy), who has been here a long time, now today we've turned and said, "Hey, we could do this." It would take some work to put it all together and then take work to do the financial side to build it up to enough to have

a health plan in place, but years ago we always said, "We'll never be able to do that." I wish we would have recognized sooner that that was potentially there and we could have done it. I wish we had one in place right now because if you really look for a weakness that would probably be one of the weaknesses. We have money in the endowment, but do we really have a health plan? And it's going to be very complicated. You have people inside the six counties, people outside the six counties. Obviously, health care in Oregon is different than health care in West Virginia or New York. It's going to be a difficult task, but I really do believe that now with the money and the finances and where the endowments are at, we can actually do it. It would be a lot of work, but I think it could be done.

***Smoke Signals:* As you leave Tribal Council, where do you see the Tribe heading?**

Leno: I've seen the Tribe grow from being just a Tribe in Grand Ronde to a Tribe that is now recognized both at the state and federal levels. I see us moving forward. We're successful. A lot of people would argue whether we're successful or not successful. We're very successful. It's just can we maintain that success on both the government side and that success of taking care of our membership. I believe we can. I think it is work. The going out with the state now and the city of Portland, that's the newer part of it, but we also have to make sure that we maintain the benefits and services for our Tribe. I believe we can keep making them better and keep moving forward. I think we need to quit panicking over things and start accepting the competition and getting better at dealing with it.

***Smoke Signals:* With your**

retirement, only two Tribal Council members will be 60 or older: What do you think of the new generation of Tribal leaders that is taking over?

Leno: There has been a change, I believe. A lot more policy and stuff that they use as opposed to direct contact with the membership. I don't see our younger councilors having as much interaction with the Tribal membership as they used to have. I can't say there's too much policy because the Tribe has grown. It's just a lot different from when you had 2,000 people and you had that direct communication with people and you had a 100 people working for the government as opposed to 400 people working for the government and a membership of 5,000. It's just grown so big that you got to have so much policy and ordinances and everything to guide you that you've kind of lost that personal deal. A lot of older people don't deal with as much policy. They like the word of mouth and the face-to-face stuff.

***Smoke Signals:* During the most recent Employee Service Awards, it seemed like you were hedging a little on this being your retirement, hinting that it might just be a "break" in service. Will it be difficult to be sitting out in the audience? Will you consider running again?**

Leno: Am I thinking about running again? Yes, I'm thinking about running again. It'll just depend on what I see happening in the Tribe because I care about the Tribe. Sure, I'm thinking about running again. Sitting out in the audience? I'm looking forward to sitting in the audience with the membership again. So many times that's one thing I missed on council: Just going to a function and being treated just like a Tribal member as opposed to a council