

better for the membership?'



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Outgoing Tribal Council Chair Reyn Leno is gifted a Tribal Pendleton logo blanket, on behalf of council, by then-Tribal Council Vice Chair Cheryle A. Kennedy, left, and Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, right, after the swearing-in ceremony for the newly elected Tribal Council members held in Tribal Council Chambers in the Governance Center on Wednesday, Sept. 13.

member. It seems like everybody's got a question for you or whatever, and you got to be careful about what you say and you have to be careful of your opinion and all that stuff, but I really miss that growing up here in Grand Ronde. I know everybody and I really miss that, not being able to sit down and have a conversation like everybody else. So I'm kind of looking forward to sitting in the audience. But I also know now, sitting on the other side of the table, what a difficult task it is to make decisions and not be able to communicate your decision-making to them.

Smoke Signals: If I gave you a magic wand and said you could change one thing about the Tribe, what would it be?

Leno: I love the Tribe. I love the success of the Tribe. I love what we can do for the membership today. I wish I could instill all the things that I grew up and learned from my grandparents, my mom and my dad and my aunts and uncles and all the people I knew here at Grand Ronde, which was a very small group. I wish every Tribal member out there could know that: the way I grew up here in Grand Ronde. I think it gives me a more of a sense of what Grand Ronde really is as an Indian Tribe. If you go too much business or whatever, are we really a Tribe? Do you lose that Tribal reputation if you go too much business? If everything is corporation, do you become a corporation or are you still a Tribe? That is one thing that would worry me: Are we becoming too much corporation and not enough Tribal? Holding on. We can go write books and read books,

but it seems to me like we don't listen enough to the Elders. It's just a different world.

Smoke Signals: An Elder once said to me that he sees any division in the Tribe as more of a schism between those who were raised in Grand Ronde and those who were not. Do you think that has any validity?

Leno: I can't speak for the people on the outside, but I can tell you that I have a lot of relations who lived in Los Angeles, who lived in Oakland, Calif., lived outside of Grand Ronde, and some of them grew up and left here and some of them came back here on a consistent basis. I guess, for me, it kind of goes to my point of I wish everybody could've grown up here at Grand Ronde. If they'd have grown up here at Grand Ronde and then left then they might have a different feeling. Is there a difference because you grew up out here? I don't know. Some of them lived in Tribal communities outside of here. Cheryle grew up in Warm Springs. I knew different ones who grew up and were involved in Indian movements and stuff outside of here. I don't think it really matters where you lived.

Smoke Signals: Like the nation as a whole, a vast majority of eligible Tribal members do not vote. Do you think there is any way the Tribe can improve voter participation or is that just the way it is because of the historical trauma and relocation of Tribal members after Termination?

Leno: I think if you did the statistics on it, the vote is whose family is running. If this person ain't run-

ning, their family won't vote. That impacts the outcome of the election. I bet if you went through and checked out everybody's vote to see what years they did vote, it would relate to somebody of their family running in that election. I think when you look at the national level, we're still pretty average even with the county and the state. I think the thought is because we only have 3,800 Tribal members over the age of 21 or something around there that we can get more. I don't think you're going to. It may, I guess. Families tend to spread out, but realistically I don't think until that changes ... I don't think it will change. It's going to be family oriented.

Smoke Signals: Opinions on per capita vary. Even previous Tribal Council members still occasionally criticize the practice during the Other Business portion of meetings. Overall, do you think it has been a good or bad practice for the Tribe?

Leno: I think it is one of the fairest things we do. I don't think it's outrageous. I don't think it harms the Tribe. I don't think we give enough that it makes people become reliant on it, but I can tell you from somebody who worked in the timber industry and lived from weekend to weekend, I would have loved to have had per capita to help my family during my 25 years in the woods. It would have been great to have something like per capita help you catch up every three months. I think it is very beneficial to the working man. It's great for the kids because theirs goes into a fund. And, of course, Elders are

always stretched thin with just Social Security. I think it's good and I don't think it hasn't made people become dependent.

Smoke Signals: You are known for your strong and unwavering support of veterans based on your two years serving in the Marine Corps and tour of duty in Vietnam. How has that wartime experience shaped your life and your service to the Tribe?

Leno: I'll go back to not only my time in Vietnam but also my 25 years working in the woods, a very dangerous occupation, especially back in those days when you were logging big logs and you didn't have an opportunity to make mistakes ... mistakes would cost you your life. Hesitation will, unfortunately like in Vietnam, get you killed. I always like to keep things moving forward. I think too much hesitation does more harm. It's like if we were dealing with an organization and we tended to just hesitate with them on a consistent basis, pretty soon they're going to lose interest in you. You got to do something positive and keep moving forward. It's easier to correct something than not do nothing at all.

Smoke Signals: I had the honor of interviewing you and your uncle Russ Leno for the 25th Restoration video and he commented that he wanted to see you as Tribal Council chair before he walked on. Do you see any of the next generation in your family possibly serving on Tribal Council? Is that something you would like to see?

Leno: Some of them have talked about it. I don't push them either way. I think to be successful on council it takes a special knack for doing it. If they want to, I would certainly be proud to have them serve on Tribal Council someday, but I don't push them one way or the other.

Smoke Signals: What is that "knack" that you are talking about?

Leno: Here's how I look at it. If you're successful at home and raising your family, doing good things, securing your finances to make sure you are going to be taken care of the rest of your life, your kids are good. Realistically, when you move to council you are just moving to a bigger family and you should use the same common sense. My dad always told me it's just adding zeroes. When you get on council, it's just adding zeroes. If you are successful raising a family and having a good family, then you will be successful on council.

Smoke Signals: What parting words of advice to you have for your fellow Tribal members?

Leno: I'll use the words of my dad: Don't forget where you come from because if you forget where you come from how will you know where you want to go? And it goes back to my comments about too many people tend to forget where we came from ... from nothing, from the two-acre cemetery and a name to where we are today. Too many people forget the journey. ■