

Tribal Council members were uniformly upset

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removed from a template used for a previous election. Tribal voters rejected changing the definition of Grand Ronde blood during the last constitutional amendment election held in July 2016.

Keller said that the incorrect information sheet was reviewed by the Tribal Attorney's Office, BIA Election Board and New Mexico-based contractor Automated Election Services and was not caught.

Keller added that Tribal Council is not involved in the election process after it passes its authorizing resolution.

Tribal Council members were uniformly upset and disappointed that the incorrect information was sent out and could possibly become a distraction or create distrust among Tribal members. The incorrect information prompted some Tribal members to question the veracity of Tribal Council on social media sites.

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy called the mistake "sabotage," but later backed away from the word because she said she realizes that BIA employees are human and make mistakes.



To hear Social Media/Digital Journalist Jennifer Clark's report on the upcoming constitutional amendment election, visit www.speaker.com and search for "Smoke Signals podcasts" or follow the link on Smoke Signals' Facebook page.

"It gets very discouraging to know that these things can happen," Kennedy said, adding that this is the third time a BIA mistake has affected a Tribal constitutional amendment election. "Now we're back at the table, defending the actions of Tribal Council after having advisory votes, public meetings and being transparent in the process."

Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. said the mistake might derail the amendment, which he said he thinks has a slim chance of

being adopted. He also called for a forensic audit to determine where the breakdown occurred.

"We just can't keep going on like this," Giffen said.

However, other Tribal Council members, such as Michael Langley, said that the mistake will not derail the effort to resolve the split-sibling situation as long as Tribal Council is unified in its message that the Grand Ronde blood definition language on the information sheet was included in error.

"It's very unfortunate, but not unprecedented," Tribal Council member Kathleen George said. "We need to send a consistent, unanimous message that it will be correct on the ballot."

Hernandez said Tribal staff will post a corrected information sheet on the Tribal website and on Facebook, and the topic was discussed during the Sunday, Jan. 6, General Council meeting.

"It's an unfortunate error that we can overcome," Hernandez said. "There is no smoking gun. It is a simple error on the information sheet."

Election process

Tribal members must specifically register to vote in BIA-run constitutional amendment elections. Being registered to vote in annual Tribal Council elections is insufficient.

Tribal Council approved an authorization to proceed in October to move forward with a proposed amendment designed to address the issue of siblings who are not Tribal members despite having brothers and sisters who are and have the same parent(s).

Tribal Council was encouraged to move the proposed constitutional amendment to a vote by a positive Sept. 8 advisory vote result. Tribal voters favored a similarly worded proposal 839 to 365, for a 69.7 percent majority. To amend the Tribal Constitution, a two-thirds majority is necessary.

Only two proposed constitutional amendments have ever received sufficient yes votes to pass — the July 1999 enrollment requirements that created the current split-sibling situation and a February 2008 proposal to increase the relinquishment period from one to five years.

Other constitutional amendment proposals have either failed to garner the two-thirds majority mandated by the Tribal Constitution or

have been defeated.

Registration packets were mailed in late December and started arriving in Tribal members' mail soon thereafter. Tribal members will have until Friday, Jan. 25, to register to vote in the election and ballots are scheduled to be mailed on Friday, Feb. 1.

Two-thirds of those who vote will have to approve for the split-siblings amendment to pass. In addition, 30 percent of those who register to vote must cast a ballot for the election to count.

In the last three constitutional amendment elections held in 2016, 2015 and 2012, an average of 1,248 Tribal members registered to vote in BIA-run elections and turnout averaged 61.3 percent.

As of the September 2018 Tribal Council election, more than 4,150 Tribal members were 18 or older, making them eligible to register in the upcoming election.

In the run-up to the election, Tribal Council has scheduled four educational sessions:

- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 16, in the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde;
- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 30, at Portland State University's Native American Student and Community Center;
- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 13, at the Lane Community College Longhouse in Eugene;
- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 20, at the Tribal Community Center in Grand Ronde.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs continues to run Tribal constitutional amendment elections because a proposal to remove the federal government from the process was defeated in March 2015 by a vote of 381 to 230.

As Kennedy pointed out, it is not the first time that mistakes by the BIA have affected Tribal constitutional amendment elections. Most recently in May 2014, Tribal Council requested the bureau cancel a scheduled election because procedural errors at the Siletz Agency Office "seriously compromised" the integrity of the election process.

Tribal Council unanimously agreed during its Jan. 2 meeting to create policies on running BIA elections at the urging of Giffen.

"Three times is three strikes," he said. "I'm not going to have egg on my face a fourth time." ■

Program problems are reported to the committee

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Members of the Health Committee are Chairwoman Bernadine Shriver, Secretary Darlene Aaron, Gladys Hobbs, Faye Smith, Claudia Leno and Empey.

"Our purpose is for us to serve as advisors to the health director and to Tribal Council," Ham said. "We strive to stay informed so that Tribal members can get the best health care possible."

Ham said that program problems are often reported to the committee, who then work with Rowe to address them.

Committee members also attend trainings and events throughout the year, such as the Gathering of Grand Ronde Tilikum in the spring and an opioids awareness training in December.

Hamm received one question from those in attendance.

After the presentation, Kennedy praised the committee members for their work.

"There is a wealth of knowledge embodied in our Health Committee," she said.

Dan Ham, Khani Schultz, Nancy Norton, Tonya Gleason-Shepek and Wayne Peters won the \$50 door prizes while Barbara Steere, Lise Alexander and Kryshanne Smith won the \$100 door prizes.

Earlier in the meeting, Kennedy addressed the Bureau of Indian Affairs error in the voter registration packets sent to Tribal members beginning in late December.

She said there will not be a vote on a possible change to the definition of Grand Ronde blood during the Feb. 25 constitutional amendment election. The only proposed change Tribal members will vote on is whether nonTribal siblings who have brothers and sisters enrolled in the Tribe and have the same parents, and who meet the membership requirements under the Tribal Constitution before Sept. 14, 1999, should be allowed to enroll to resolve the split-sibling issue affecting some Tribal families.

"There has been a lot of discussion about the upcoming election," Kennedy said. "This matter came about as a result of advisory votes. Overwhelmingly, split families were at the top. We did this by resolution and it was done very publicly."

Local educational meetings for the constitutional amendment election will be held 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 16 and Feb. 20, at the Tribal Community Center. Dinner will be provided.

Offsite meeting dates will be held 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 30, at Portland State University's Native American Student and Community Center, and 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 13, at the Lane Community College Longhouse in Eugene.

Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George led the cultural presentation to open the meeting.

The entire meeting can be viewed by visiting the Tribal website at www.grandronde.org and clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■

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