

‘I have always believed that sovereignty is the basis’

SERVICE continued
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studied: What makes a leader a leader? Are they born or are they made? I tend to believe that they are made, that there is destiny and that’s what promotes you.

I was always very shy, a true introvert. In my family and my siblings, I have extroverts who are very gregarious and when they feel good they can dance on the top of a table. They thrive on that; the energy of the people just invigorates them. Not me.

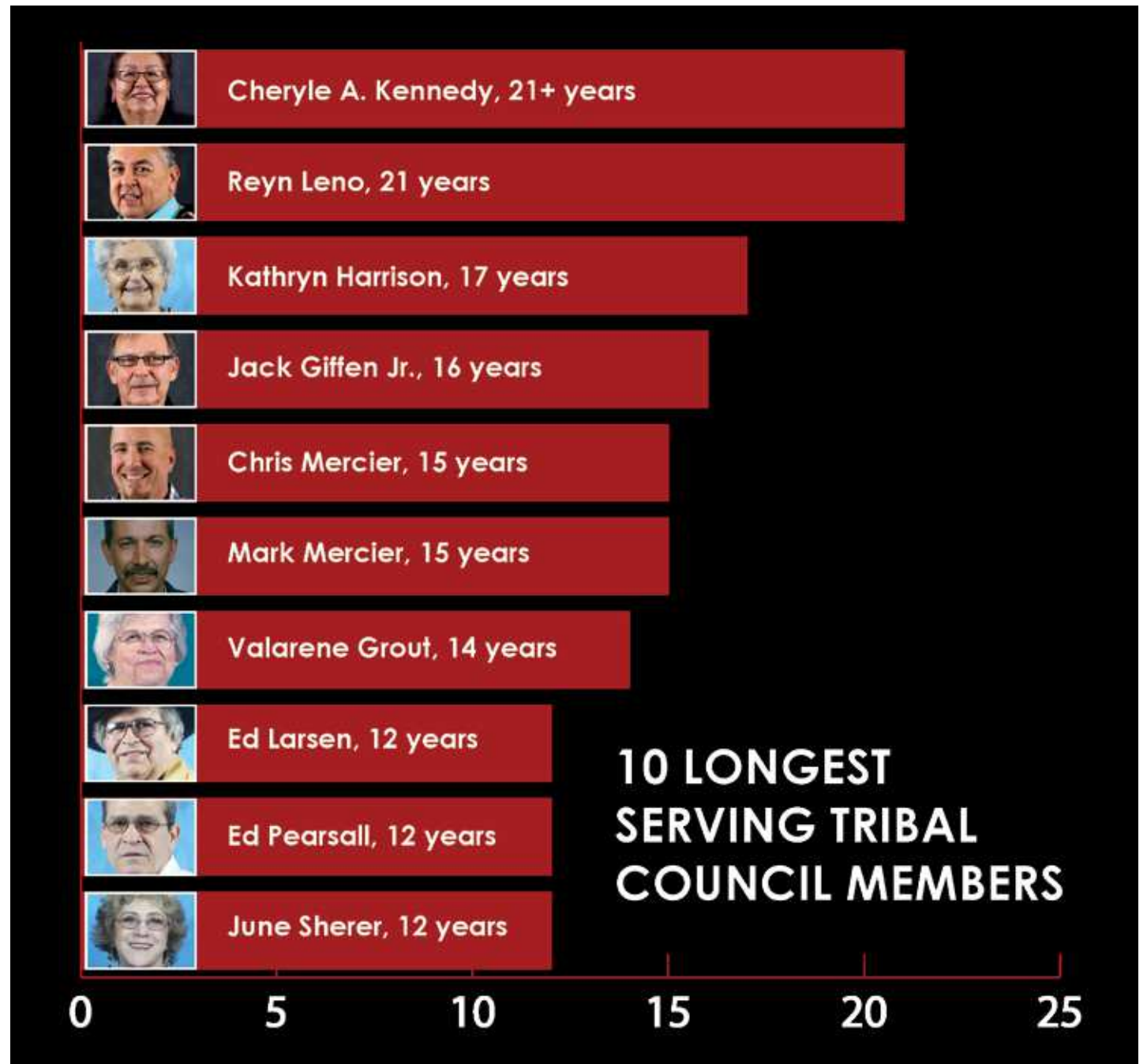
But I look back in my family, and I have four chiefs who signed treaties and I believe that those attributes, whether you know it or not, are being taught to you in your growing years.

Q. You mentioned politics earlier and another number I wanted to run by you is that you have been elected chairwoman 13 of your 21 years on Tribal Council. Was it a difficult time for you recently when you were not the chair for five years?

Kennedy: If there were any difficulties it was really in promoting things that I thought were important to the Tribe. Again, I started with sovereignty. I have always believed that sovereignty is the basis. We had to be solidly in our foundation, so all of the governance pieces for sovereignty had to be place and, at times, I felt like that wasn’t at the forefront. I think for me that was a bit of a struggle because I know that you govern your own people. That means you also take care of them.

Q. Where does the current problem – the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic – rate as a problem in your 21 years on Tribal Council? Is it the biggest challenge you’ve seen?

Kennedy: No. Termination. When we had N1/H1, which was a few years back, it was the same kind of thing except there was a cure that happened early on or it would have been like this. Very serious. Living through the era of polio, for Tribal people tuberculosis ... for me, this one is because public health measures are the cure. It’s so hard for people to abide by them and they take it lightly. I believe we would have had a handle on it if we would have closed at the end of February. I believe it would have been contained, but it was let’s wait and see. If people get it, then we’ll do something. Well, that’s not the right approach.



Graphic by Samuel Briggs III



Smoke Signals file photo

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy met with President Barack Obama at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland in October 2010.

Q. Is there one thing that you’ve accomplished in your 21 years that you are most proud of?

Kennedy: Truly, the Health & Wellness Center so that our people could have good health, that we could live out our lives and have a quality of life vs. just living. A lot of that is preventive. Ninety percent of our ailments are due to our behavior. Some of us can have wonderful genes, but you can destroy it through some of the bad behaviors that occur. This epidemic is because we want to continue to do what we want and I understand choice, but someplace in there the voice of reason has to prevail.

Q. You also had a birthday on April 3 and you turned 72. Have you thought about how much longer you want to continue serving on Tribal Council?

Kennedy: I don’t look it at like that. You’re there for however long you’re there. ... When I was hired for Grand Ronde. When I came back as one of the first three em-

ployees hired, my path has always been about milestones and almost prophetic words to me. When I left to go to Burns in 1980, I lived in Madras and I didn’t want to go over there, but I did because of this. I was so distressed about it. I didn’t know what to do. There was this light in the middle of the night and it scared me, but I heard this voice speaking to me. It told me this, “Yes, go and help these people over there so that they can be strong as you are strong. You’ll be there just a little while and then when that is over I will take you to the land I gave to you and your people in the west. And when you go there, you’re going to go in and help possess the land that I have given you. When that’s done, you and your little ones and your people will be at rest.” That is what I heard. ... When it’s all done? I don’t know. ■

Certified Application Assisters at the Health & Wellness Center

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