

Tribal Council candidates answer membership questions

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

Approximately 30 people turned out in person Wednesday, July 16, to hear candidates for Tribal Council discuss their vision for the Tribe, with several others watching on Zoom during the Tribal Council Candidates Forum.

Interim General Manager Bryan Langley moderated the forum, held in Tribal Council Chambers, and asked questions submitted by Tribal members ahead of the event.

Eight candidates are vying for three council seats. Incumbents Denise Harvey and Kathleen George are facing challengers Valeria Atanacio, Pamala Warren-Chase, Toby McClary, Peter Grout, Lisa Archuleta and Pete Wakeland.

Questions covered a range of topics, including candidates’ stance on Tribal executives having contracts, how they would combat nepotism if elected, what their top three priorities would be as a council member and their plans for economic development.

This year there was a new question format. Instead of three candidates answering the same question, each candidate was asked three different questions, with one question per round. There were 21 total questions asked of the seven candidates in attendance. Wakeland was unable to attend the forum.

The forum began with candidates introducing themselves.

Harvey has served on the Tribal Council for 12 years.

“I have been honored to serve our membership and Indian Country,” she said. “I have been a national representative and first Oregon Tribal leader to be on the IGA Board of Directors and the HUD Advisory Committee...As a leader, I take my responsibility here for the Tribe to be strong, to be knowledgeable, to have an opinion and make a decision. That’s what we’re elected to do.”

George has served on council for nine years. She said that there is “amazing work” going on in the community, from the Tribal homeownership development to new rental housing, salmon recovery and other natural resource efforts.

“While we’re proud of everything we’ve accomplished, we’ve got work yet to do,” she said. “We have to refocus on maintaining our market share and leadership in Tribal gaming in Oregon...On council, we need to adopt best practices around when we should be having executive sessions and confidential ATPs (authorization to proceed).”

Atanacio is a second-time candidate and currently serves on the Tribe’s Education Committee and

previously worked for the Tribe as the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coordinator.

“I believe that community care is at the heart of everything that we do here,” Atanacio said. “It’s something that I strive to model for my children every day...Leadership starts with care. It’s about walking the walk, not for recognition, but because it’s the right thing to do.”

Warren-Chase is running for council for the third time and has worked for the Tribe in various capacities throughout the years. She is the Spirit Mountain Community Fund administrative assistant.

“I’m proud to be running again for Tribal Council this year,” she said. “I’m open to any conversations, comments or questions. Email me, text me...Feel free to reach out to me if I answer a question today or if I don’t get a question that you wanted me to answer...That goes for anything else that happens here. If you want more information, I’m available for anyone to contact.”

McClary served on council from 2009 to 2015, then worked outside of the Tribe for several years before being hired as the Procurement Department supervisor last year.

“I had an opportunity to learn a lot coming back after running and managing my own business for 10 years...to come back into the Procurement Department and see a lot of things that bring me some concern,” he said. “I wasn’t planning necessarily on running for council, but I feel like I have a skill set and a work ethic that could be beneficial to our current Tribal government and I feel that my leadership can definitely help.”

Grout is employed as a surveillance technician at Spirit Mountain Casino and ran for council in 2019 and 2020.

“I’m running independently,” he said. “I have never been a big fan of the groups and always felt it has brought in an ‘us versus them’ mentality. I’ve always been one to support the issue. I will never vote for something because of somebody who put it forward and I will never vote against something just because of who put it forward.”

Archuleta has served as the Tribal Services Representative in the Tribe’s Portland office for 22 years and is a first-time candidate for council.

“While being there, I have learned to use my time management well and always was a great listener for the people and let the people know to come here, it’s a safe place, a healing place, a place of culture,” she said. “Now, I’m ready to move forward in a new direction and some of the things I would like to

see is housing, not just in Grand Ronde, but in Portland and the surroundings areas. With economic development, build our portfolio more and get some new things to make monies for the future, for our kids and the membership.”

Wakeland previously served as the Tribe’s Natural Resources Department director and as deputy director under the Tribal General Manager. He was unable to attend the forum due to prior work travel commitments.

Candidate questions

Due to the number of questions asked this year of each candidate and space considerations, Smoke Signals will not include all of these. To listen to the entire forum, visit www.grandronde.org/videos/ and look under “Tribal Council Candidates Forum.”

Warren-Chase was asked how she would combat nepotism if elected to Tribal Council.

“I’m only one person,” she said. “But I can tell you how I feel about nepotism. I do not support it. I have been in this community for 30-plus years and I have never held any store as to what anybody’s last name was. All I know is my last name and if that’s how you’re going to lead your life is leading with your last name, there’s gotta be more substance to you than that...I don’t know how you can ban it (nepotism) other than by not engaging, not supporting and not turning a blind eye to it.”

McClary was asked if the Tribe’s executive staff should have contracts.

“I think a contract is really built to find comfort between the hiring organization and the employee,” he said. “I feel like the Tribal leadership team puts the managers and executive staff in these positions for a reason, and if the employee feels insecure about the duration of their position and if they feel more comfortable with having a contract, I would not say no to that... But we are (also) trying to create self-sustaining positions for our Tribal membership first and then outside of our Tribal membership as well, so I could go both ways on that one.”

Atanacio was asked what her top three priorities would be if elected to council.

“One core issue is building sustainable economic growth for our Tribe that’s rooted in cultural values and our responsibility to community care,” she said. “We need to invest in Tribally-owned businesses, support workforce pathways and continue building out our land and our protected areas for our own use and gain...I believe we have a responsibility to create systems where economic strength and cultural stewardship go hand-in-hand...One of the other issues I see is community accountability, some of what’s already come up in in the questions, concerns about ethics and our responsibility to uphold those.”

George was asked what plans she had for economic development.

“I think the first and most im-

portant thing is that we need to maintain our leadership and market share and we’re very fortunate to have an amazing team over at Spirit Mountain Casino...We have to maintain a competitive property...We have to give people a reason to come back to the casino...We also need to look into energy development. There are huge opportunities for Tribes right now, and we need to get into that game and get some of that market share. I’d also like to see us support our Tribal members with small business development in Oregon...We need multiple layers of investment in our community and in our economy.”

Archuleta was asked what steps she would take to ensure fair and equal treatment for all Tribal members.

“We need to be good listeners for our membership and I feel like sometimes we’re not always listening...One thing I’ve learned working up in the Portland office is, I hear all the time that, ‘It doesn’t matter,’ but it does matter. It’s important for people to give other people those opportunities to listen and to talk and sometimes I think we forget about that in listening to the membership.”

Harvey was asked if she supports a Tribally operated school that goes through the high school level.

“I’m very supportive and spent the last 10 years working to where we could expand our childcare and Head Start...I don’t have one set vision on what that looks like but really look forward to working with the team of people that we have in developing that and (seeing) how that works out. I really hope we have the foresight because there’s oftentimes decisions that we make and we’re not looking at the big picture and how it’s going to play out until we get things started, and then we find we should have communicated with more people... Being a Tribal leader isn’t just sitting at a table and checking a box and signing your name, it’s actually being out there working with the people that work for you.”

Grout was asked what role a Tribal Council member should play in day-to-day Tribal operations.

“The first thing that comes to mind is as little as possible,” he said. “That’s not really their jobs. I’m a firm believer in hiring good people and letting them do their jobs...Be a facilitator, make sure that our employees and staff have all the tools they need, resources they need to do their job and do it well. I see council as a big decision maker. Day-to-day, that’s our employees and that’s why we hire people. We have almost 900 employees...I’m not a big micromanager. I just don’t believe that’s the place for council to be in day-to-day operations.”

After the forum, Smoke Signals Social Media/Digital Journalist Kamiah Koch asked candidates how the forum had gone for them in “post-game wrap up,” style interviews. Candidates’ answers are unedited and the video is available on the “Smoke Signals newspaper” YouTube channel. ■

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