

# Leading gubernatorial hopefuls oppose Gorge casino

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

It is increasingly likely that the next governor of Oregon will not be supportive of the Warm Springs Tribe's proposal to build a new casino in Cascade Locks in the Columbia River Gorge.

After recent informational meetings with the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, the leading candidates in both the Republican and Democratic primary races issued statements in opposition to the casino proposal.

This will mean a sharp change in policy in the governor's office. Current Gov. Ted Kulongoski, who is being term-limited out of office, and the Warm Springs signed a compact in 2005 allowing the project to proceed, but the proposal has been stalled since then in the U.S. Department of Interior decision-making process.

Numerous hearings were held by the Department of Interior in Oregon and Washington state in March 2008 regarding the Warm Springs proposal. No decision has been issued.

"It would be very difficult for that proposal to become reality," said Tribal member and Tribal lobbyist Justin Martin to *The Oregonian* about the gubernatorial candidates' stands and their effect on the Warm Springs proposal.

On the Republican side, former Portland Trail Blazer Chris Dudley,

## In their own words

"I opposed this proposal as governor and I will continue to oppose it if elected to another term. There are other good alternatives for the Warm Springs Tribe and it is time they avail themselves of a productive alternative to site a facility on their own reservation lands. This issue has gone on for too long and it is time for us all to be a part of putting it behind us."

— John Kitzhaber

"In keeping with my support in only allowing casinos on Tribal lands, I would oppose this specific off-reservation proposal in the Gorge."

— Bill Bradbury

"I am opposed to off-reservation gaming, and to an expansion of gambling in general. While I respect the sovereignty of Oregon's Native American Tribes and the casinos you now operate within reservation boundaries, I do not support off-reservation casinos and specifically oppose an off-reservation casino in Cascade Locks, a private casino in Wood Village, or other projects that would represent a proliferation of gambling in Oregon beyond its current level."

— Chris Dudley

"I support the current policy ... and oppose the Gorge casino."

— Allen Alley

who visited the Grand Ronde Tribal Council on March 31, said through a spokesman that he does not support building a casino at Cascade Locks or in the Columbia River Gorge "under any circumstances."

Allen Alley, who visited with the Grand Ronde Tribal Council on March 24, said that he would oppose a Gorge casino if elected governor.

On the Democratic side, former Secretary of State Bill Bradbury told the Grand Ronde Tribal Council during a March 24 visit that he did not think making an exception for one Tribe under the state's "one casino on reservation land" policy makes sense. He also said he was concerned about allowing Tribes to move closer to population centers, taking good-

paying jobs out of economically depressed rural Oregon.

Former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, who has a long record of opposing the Gorge casino proposal, said the Warm Spring Tribe has "good alternatives" on its existing reservation — the largest in the state — in north-central Oregon.

Kitzhaber, during his March 31 visit with the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, said he had called Department of Interior staff to let them know that if he is elected governor for a third time, he will not support a Gorge casino.

Martin said the Grand Ronde Tribe has donated \$20,000 to Kitzhaber's campaign, \$2,000 each to Bradbury and Dudley, and \$1,000 to Alley.

Martin said the donations reflect the Tribe's support in the race for governor. The primary election is Tuesday, May 18.

Grand Ronde has long opposed the Warm Springs casino proposal, citing the inequity of abandoning Oregon's "one casino on reservation land" rule, especially after other Tribes have invested heavily in their gaming sites that are not close to major metropolitan areas, such as Portland or Salem.

The Warm Springs Tribe has a casino — Kah-Nee-Ta High Desert Resort — on its reservation in central Oregon just north of Madras and a one-hour drive from state's eighth largest city, Bend. ■