

Filing, election dates set

Constitution revision draws 83% approval

Citizen Potawatomi Nation officials and staff are implementing constitutional changes that were overwhelmingly approved in a Secretarial Election this summer. Results from the election, which ended on August 16, show 1,806 yes votes and 374 no votes, with 82.84% of voters backing the revision.

The proposal also met a second approval hurdle, having at least 30% of CPN members who registered for the election actually cast ballots. The 2,180 who voted represent 65.7% of the 3,318 who registered.

Implementation of the revisions was delayed as the Bureau of Indian Affairs decided election protests filed by three dissident CPN members - Diana Brasfield of Bartlesville, Oklahoma; Penny Bishop of Morrison, Colorado; and Sheila Hall of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

CPN Chairman John Barrett said, "Filing these protests was frivolous and shameful. It demonstrated contemptuous disregard for the will of the people. We are confident the protests will be rejected within a short time."

The Chairman's optimism was confirmed when, in early October, BIA officials rejected the protests, ratifying the revision. In rejecting the protests, Carl Artman, Assistant Secretary of the Interior/Indian Affairs, told Brasfield, Bishop, and Hall, "You base your challenge on grounds that are not related to the Secretarial election...The CPN voters ratified the amended constitution with a large majority in support of the constitution as proposed. This decision is final for the Department."

Artman's decision set in motion a 10-day window for the existing Business Committee to approve apportionment of tribal members who live outside Oklahoma into eight population-balanced legislative districts. It also started a clock ticking on "a special election (to be) held within 120 days of the adoption of this Amendment in which eleven (11) Legislators will be elected." That election will be held on February 2, 2008.

Ratification of the approval vote creates a 16-member CPN legislature. Half the members will be elected at-large from Oklahoma to represent their fellow Citizen Potawatomis in the state. The other eight members will each represent a legislative district outside Oklahoma. Tribal members in each outside-Oklahoma district will elect the representative from their district.

The current Business Committee, which will cease to exist once the 11 remaining members of the new CPN Legislature are elected, has approved boundaries for the population-balanced legislative districts outside Oklahoma. A map depicting those districts can be found on page 1 of this *HowNiKan*.

The Business Committee has amended the Nation's Election Ordinance to set up a process for filing for office for tribal members who would like to represent their fellow Potawatomis in the legislature. The filing period opens on Monday, October 29, 2007 and closes at 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 8, 2007. The filing fee is \$150. A filing form can be found on page 24 of this *HowNiKan* or online at www.CPNElectionCentral.org.

Prospective candidates can file via mail at CPN Election Committee, 1601 S. Gordon Cooper Dr., Shawnee, OK 74801. A copy of the prospective candidate's tribal membership card must accompany the notarized filing papers.

A Ballot Request Period will begin on November 1, 2007 and end on January 20, 2008. An in-person polling place will be open from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Saturday,

February 2, 2008 for all 11 legislative positions to be filled in this election. It will be at the Nation's tribal courtroom in the Administration Building.

If, in any of the 11 elections, there is no candidate who receives at least a majority of the votes cast in that race, the top two vote-getters will face each other in a run-off election.

CPN officials believe the Nation is the first Indian tribe in the United States to extend this level of participation in its government to members who live outside the tribal jurisdiction, to say nothing of those who live anywhere in the United States.

The change in the Citizen Potawatomi Nation's basic form of government is designed to accomplish two goals - extend more input into their government's decisions to tribal members who live outside Oklahoma and take a major step toward a three-branch government with checks and balances.

The Citizen Potawatomi Nation currently has an enrollment of approximately 26,700. About 10,000 of those members live in Oklahoma. Tribal leaders say those members who live away from the tribe's jurisdiction deserve an opportunity to influence their government's decisions on enacting laws and writing a budget.

To this point, the CPN has been governed by a five-member Business Committee. The entire Business Committee serves as a legislature. Three of its members -the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Secretary-Treasurer- comprise the Nation's executive committee. Under provisions of this constitutional revision, all three, along with the other two Business Committee members, will be members of the legislature. Tribal officials plan a subsequent constitutional amendment to move them out of the legislature into a solely administrative branch of the tribal government.

This constitutional revision accomplishes a third goal. It removes the U.S. Interior Secretary's authority to veto proposed changes in the CPN constitution.