

‘Out of the blue,’ top cop gets Palin’s axe

By Kyle Hopkins
Anchorage Daily News

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Gov. Sarah Palin appointed Walt Monegan as commissioner of public safety shortly after her election in 2006. On Friday, Palin’s chief of staff told Monegan he was being replaced.

The news came “out of the blue,” said Monegan, a former Anchorage police chief.

“If the governor was upset with me for one thing or another, it had never been communicated to me,” he said in an interview Saturday evening.

The big question -- why? -- went largely unanswered Saturday.

Palin spokeswoman Sharon Leighow said the governor is now at the halfway point of her term and it’s natural for her to make changes.

Palin wanted the public safety department headed in a new direction, Leighow said.

Asked Saturday what Palin wants to change, Leighow said she didn’t have details.

“The governor feels that the department of public safety could be better served under new management,” she said.

Palin offered Monegan a different job, as executive director of the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. He turned it down.

The head of the union that represents state troopers, one of the agencies Monegan oversaw, said replacing him was the wrong move and that troopers were happy with department leadership “for the first time in years.”

Palin has called for cuts to the public safety budget, while Monegan wanted more troopers, said John Cyr, executive director of the Public Safety Employees Association.

“Her basic mission is to cut the basic cost of government,” he said. “I understand that. But when you do that with public safety, that means that people are less safe in their homes.”

Leighow said she wasn’t aware of budget decisions playing a role in Monegan’s dismissal and that Palin is looking to trim spending across all departments -- not just public safety.

“The governor supports fully funding trooper positions,” Leighow said.

This is not the first time Monegan has lost his job. In 2006, Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich asked him to leave his post as Anchorage police chief early, although Monegan was willing to stay on another year. At the time, Begich had just won re-election and was restructuring department leadership.

Monegan joked that he’s “getting a complex,” but said the kinds of jobs he’s had lately are ones where you serve at the pleasure of your boss.

“They can call me in and say, you know, ‘I don’t like your hair; you’re fired,’ “ Monegan said.

For now, deputy public safety commissioner John Glass is filling Monegan’s old job. The governor plans to announce a new commissioner -- selected from a short list of candidates -- later this week, Leighow said.

Monegan said he returned from working with wildlife troopers in Bristol Bay to Anchorage for the Friday meeting with Palin’s acting chief of staff Mike Nizich. He figured they’d be talking about security for the upcoming governor’s picnics, Monegan said.

Instead, he was offered the new job and told he couldn’t keep his old one.

“When we sat down, (Nizich) started discussing how the governor wanted to utilize my expertise and enthusiasm to help people in rural areas and the Bush by becoming the executive director of the ABC Board,” Monegan said.

“I said, ‘What’s this mean ... I guess I’m no longer commissioner?’” He said, “That’s correct.”

Woman’s 108 years celebrated

By John David Sutter
Oklahoman

OKMULGEE, Okla. — In 1900, Martha Berryhill was born into a dark period of American history — one in which the federal government tried to strip Berryhill and others of their Muscogee (Creek) identity.

Today, on Berryhill’s 108th birthday, members of the Creek Nation are still struggling with laws set up then to break down their culture, language and traditions.

And while they celebrated Berryhill’s long life on Thursday with a colorful cake, Creek-language hymns and construction paper birthday

cards, Berryhill’s friends and family already were talking about how when the “jewel of the tribe” is gone, it will be an end of an era for American Indians.

“If she ever goes, she’s going to be taking a lot of history with her,” said Dora Neconish, 63. “It’s a new chapter for the Creeks.”

After Berryhill’s family was forcibly moved to Oklahoma from the southeast United States on the Trail of Tears of the 1830s, they set up in Indian Territory, or what now is Oklahoma. At first, the land was used communally, in keeping with Indian traditions.

Then, after the General Allotment Act was passed in 1887, nine years before Berry-

hill’s birth, the federal government imposed a system of private property rights on the people of Indian Territory. Each adult member of an Indian tribe was given 80 to 160 acres of land.

The program was designed to turn Indians into “responsible farmers in the white man’s image,” according to Encyclopedia Britannica.

Berryhill is the last living member of the Creek Nation who was given land as part of the Allotment Act. She’s also the last of the tribe who was listed on a government roll of American Indians — called the Dawes Rolls.

That listing still causes headaches and resentment among American Indians

today, as it is used to determine who is and isn’t Indian, and therefore who is eligible for certain benefits given to Indian people.

Some say the list is inaccurate. Others feel like it was used to divide and conquer native people.

Moreover, the list and the land divisions cut the timeline of Creek life in half. Berryhill was born at the time of the split, and so she’s lived a life with one foot in the traditional world that existed before the removal and the land division, and one in the Western world that followed, said Geri Berryhill Johnson, Berryhill’s 61-year-old niece.

Many traditions of the Creeks live with her 108-year-

old aunt, Berryhill Johnson said. The traditions are not written down, only passed orally.

While she’s familiar with much of the history, she said historical questions undoubtedly will come up that only her aunt can answer.

“Once she’s gone we have no one to ask if we don’t know it now,” Berryhill Johnson said at Thursday’s birthday party at a Creek Nation retirement center in Okmulgee.

Family members and friends say Berryhill was a fiercely independent woman in her youth who loved to walk miles and miles to pick wild onions and blueberries. She used them to make traditional foods and cobblers, they said, and she would take the homemade treats to older members of the tribe who lived nearby.

Berryhill is a fluent speaker of the tribal language, Mvskoke, and loves to sing and once played the guitar, they said.

While a Methodist singing group performed for her Thursday, Berryhill swayed and sang along in her native language. She sat at a long meeting table at the front of the room, and tapped on it with her hands.

Berryhill lives with her daughter, Ruby Mauk, 87, who said she can’t speak the Creek language at all.

Mauk said she once could speak bits of the language, but then she went to a girls’ boarding school in Eufaula where English was taught. Teachers would punish the students for speaking their native languages, she said, and eventually she lost all knowledge of the Creek language.

Monte Randall, a University of Oklahoma graduate student working with the nation’s Mvskoke language program, said this is a turning point for the Creek language. Elders hold most of the knowledge, and they’re dying off, said Randall, who was part of a group that trained children to sing in Mvskoke for the birthday party.



Associated Press

Martha Berryhill, who turns 108 on Saturday, returns a high-five as she is honored Thursday, by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation at a birthday party in Okmulgee, Okla. She is the last of the tribe's original allottees.

Park complex honors Code Talkers

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A sports complex planned for Mission will honor the Lakota Code Talkers of World War II, university and Rosebud Sioux tribal officials say.

Plans for Code Talkers Memorial Park call for a baseball field, playgrounds and picnic areas.

Also, the complex could offer summer recreation and wellness programs through an agreement between the tribe and South Dakota State University, according to Russell Stubbles, an SDSU professor in the Department of Horticulture, Forestry, Landscape and Parks.

The project is an example of “upstream thinking” in a society that too often reacts

to problems with jail or punishment, Stubbles said.

The idea began in 2006 when tribal officials asked SDSU to help provide recreation and parks development and programs for the reservation.

“The secret is not to build the prisons, but to build and promote social wellness programs,” Stubbles said. “Our total package with the Reservation Recreation Project recognizes this. We aim to bring recreation programs to the youth out in the little communities all summer long. That is where the hope will have to be planted.”

The park is named for a little-known piece of American Indian history. Code talkers used American Indi-

an languages to baffle the Japanese and help win the war in the Pacific.

The park is to contain a grove made up of trees taken from the various reservation communities of the 11 men who served the U.S. Army as Lakota Code Talkers during World War II.

The project could cost \$1 million and take three years to complete. Fundraising will be conducted through the SDSU Foundation.

The tribe agreed to create a parks and recreation division to work with SDSU.

“There are many good people on the Rosebud who are trying, but they are overwhelmed by it all,” Stubbles said. “We are offering hope.”

Tribe tries four-day work week

By Patricia Ecker
Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun

MT. PLEASANT, Mich. — The Tribal Council of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe made the decision to shorten the work week for Tribal Operations employees last month.

In an effort to help employees manage the rising cost of gasoline, the Tribe began offering its employees a gas discount in June.

This week, Tribal Council allowed their government and services departments to shorten extend their work days to 10 hours, and close their government building on Fridays through September.

“This is a trial period for the rest of the fiscal year,” Tribal spokesman Joe Sowmick said. “It was implemented (Monday), and a lot of effort went in to making the proper arrangements so there is no lapse in service.”

Sowmick said the Nimkee Memorial Wellness Center began preparing for its first 10-hour day for two weeks with hours from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sowmick said implementing the work week change was “quite challenging.”

“The fitness center hours are up to the program directors, which will be implemented through Tribal administration,” Sowmick said. “Some of our departments will stay with the eight-hour a day, five-day-a-week schedule.”

Departments within Public Safety, utilities, the Andahwod senior center, and residential treatment center will continue with their 24 hour, seven days a week services.

“The rationale is clear that by going to a four-day week there is less commute time and more productivity,” Sowmick said. “Many corpo-

rations and governments have been going to this.

“This is going to help our families in a positive way.”

There are a number of employees who must travel some distance to work.

“We have employees who drive from Clare County, Gratiot County and Bay County,” Sowmick said. “It is going to be a benefit for them.”

The Tribal government building houses the Tribal gym, a gathering place for local children.

“The building usage will be scheduled accordingly to maintain Tribal programs,” Sowmick said. “There is a lot of activity through our summer (youth) programs, and the last thing we want to do is have a lapse in services for our Tribal youth.

“Once we address health care concerns, we will look at our Tribal youth. The evaluation is ongoing.”

Tribal judge rejects budget challenge

By Heather Allen
New London Day

NEW LONDON, Conn. — Mashantucket Tribal Court Judge Thomas J. Londregan ruled this week that, under the tribe’s constitution, a petition circulated by tribal members seeking input in the government’s budgeting process through the ability to send the spending plan to a referendum was not valid.

The petition, which was signed by 800 to 900 members of the tribe, was filed with tribal council in March and asked that members have a say in how to trim \$40 million from the tribal government’s budget. The petition asked that tribal members do so through a referendum.

The petitioners were particularly concerned when they learned that 170 tribal-government employees would be offered buyouts and laid off as a result of budget cuts.

Londregan, in the 14-page decision issued Wednesday afternoon, ruled that the petition is “not the proper subject matter for a referendum” under the tribe’s constitution.

The petition’s sponsors declined to comment on Londregan’s decision.

The main sticking point was a fundamental problem with the petition, which outlined six things that the petitioners hoped to achieve.

The tribe argued a referendum petition must be in a form that can be reasonably capable of being understood on a ballot, according to Londregan’s decision. The tribe also argued that because the petition combined more than two forms of relief, it is impossible to present a question calling for a single “yes or no” answer on a ballot.

“This case,” Londregan wrote in his decision, “demonstrates the strained relationship that develops between the power of the people to legislate directly through the process of referendum and the mandate requiring elected officials to discharge their duties in accordance with law.”

And while Londregan’s ruling came down to the mechanics of the petition, he hinted that if tribal members are dissatisfied with the tribal council they should keep that in mind in future tribal elections.

“It is not the province of this court to determine what information, reports, or participation, if any, the Petitioners should have in the formulation of the budget,” Londregan wrote in his decision. “The electorate’s satisfaction with the Tribal Council in matters such as disclosure of reports and information and listening to the Tribal voters is best left to the ballot box and not the courtroom.”

Since the tribe has already laid off nearly 200 government employees and another 100 or so at Foxwoods Resort Casino, which it owns and operates, it remains unclear what recourse tribal members may have.

While she did not sign the petition, Tribal Elder Barbara Poirier attended both hearings in tribal court relating to the case and reviewed a copy of Londregan’s decision.

Poirier said this case should serve as a lesson on how to use the right of referendum.

“We must respect the decision of the tribal court and use this as an opportunity to learn and grow and become more unified,” she said.