

## Tribe appeals primary disqualification

By Travis Coleman  
Great Falls Tribune

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — The Chippewa Cree Tribe’s Election Board will appeal a judge’s move to throw out the results of their primary election, ensuring the future of the tribe’s election will be locked in litigation indefinitely.

Daniel Belcourt, the tribe’s attorney, said the appeal could be filed in tribal court as soon as today, which would be six days after Tribal Court Judge Carl Pepion said that a new primary election must be held within 30 days of his ruling. The general election would then take place two weeks after the primary.

Belcourt wants to expedite the hearing but fears it could be a month before the situation is resolved. Tribal voters were to choose a tribal chairman and four tribal council members during general elections Tuesday.

Pepion’s ruling favored Ken Blatt-St. Marks, who has accused the tribe’s election board of violating several tribal ordinances before and during the primary, which were moves he said led to him losing his bid to be the tribe’s chairman.

Pepion agreed, saying the violations resulted in at least 48 improperly counted ballots. The board illegally extended the absentee balloting period and illegally used a vote-counting machine to determine whether ballots were properly marked, according to court documents.

Pepion said he was sympathetic to the board’s approach to count all votes but contended that a referendum is required to make these changes.

Election Board Chairwoman Kathy Henry said Pepion’s ruling was premature because the only issue in tribal court Friday was St. Marks’ petition for a temporary restraining order that would prevent the board from conducting the general election Tuesday.

“In our opinion, the judge overstepped his authority by striking down the previous primary election and ordering a new primary election,” Henry said, adding that Pepion should have first acted on the restraining order.

St. Marks filed the order in tribal court on the Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation after the board denied his petition to void the Oct. 15 primary.

Before the results were voided, Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy and Raymond Jake Parker were scheduled to square off for the tribal chairman position on Tuesday. The council candidates who moved on from the original primary were Chairman Houle, council Vice Chairman Brian “Kelly” Eagleman, council member Donovan Stump, Tim Koop, Bruce Sunchild, Alvin John Windy Boy Sr., Joseph “Big Joe” LaFromboise and Russell Standing Rock.

Tribal voters will again be asked to narrow down a field of six candidates to two for the tribal chairman position, and to cut down a field of 58 candidates vying for spots on the tribal council. Eight of those candidates will appear on the general election ballot.

Candidates who were on the original primary ballot will not have to re-file. No new candidates can enter the race.

## Former casino worker admits embezzling money

MUSKOGEE, Okla. (AP) — A former employee of the Seminole Nation River Mist Casino has pleaded guilty to embezzling from the casino.

U.S. Attorney Sheldon Sperling says 22-year-old Gannon Brown of Bowlegs pleaded guilty Wednesday to a charge of theft by officers or employees of an Indian gaming establishment.

Sperling says Brown embezzled more than \$1,000 from the casino between late February and mid June.

Sperling says Brown will likely face from 12 to 18 months in prison when he’s sentenced following a presentence report.

# Young woman declares religious identity

GALLUP (AP) — One day. One piece of cloth.

“Before I was just some girl, you know,” Amber Tom says. “But then, after, it’s like, ‘Oh, it’s that girl. She’s the girl with the scarf.’ I think that’s what people around here call me. They don’t know my name.”

Since we’re talking about labels, these are Amber Tom’s: 20-year-old. Navajo. University of New Mexico-Gallup student. Devout Muslim.

It’s the last identity that Tom has worn literally for the past two years.

“I just showed up one day with my head covered. I didn’t talk to anyone about it,” Tom says. “But I never took it off after that.”

Tom’s decision to begin wearing a hijab, the women’s head covering that is prescribed in the Quran, was a public statement of something Tom had never hidden from her Navajo friends and classmates at Gallup High School, but something she had never advertised, either.

“I actually wanted to do it in high school,” Tom says. But high school is a hard place to be different. “I wasn’t brave enough. I just couldn’t take the criticism yet.”

In high school, when Tom was just another Navajo girl, she heard the kind of prejudice that people express when they think they’re with their own: anti-Arab, anti-Muslim. People who didn’t know Tom well never would have guessed those slurs were also pointed at her.

Amber’s mother, a Navajo jewelry maker, was divorced with three kids when she met a Palestinian immigrant who was working for one of the many Arab-owned jewelry companies in Gallup.

Annabelle Wilson and Mustafa Ismail married when Amber was less than a year old and her brothers were 5 and 7. They all moved into Annabelle’s one-room home in Tseyatoh west of Gallup and began to make a life as a blended family: blended

racess, blended cultures and blended religions.

While her older brothers were raised with Navajo traditions by their grandparents, Amber and her two half-sisters, Layla and Haya, were raised Muslim.

Amber was the only Navajo praying with the other

women in the ornate green and white mosque that sits on Gallup’s main highway.

“It just hit me one day: You know, I’m so dedicated. I believe with all my heart, without a doubt, that this is the religion that I want to have. So I was doing everything according to the Quran

except for the hijab,” Amber says. “When I first started wearing the hijab I had a lot of criticism. Actually, I lost all of my friends, all of them.”

When Amber started her first semester at UNM-Gallup, she wore the hijab as well as the abaya, the long

dress or robe that Muslim women wear.

She hadn’t been at school long when some boys put a dent in her car and told her, “You need to tell the Arabs to go back to their country.”

She kept the hijab, but started wearing jeans and tops like a normal college student.

“If I wear the abaya and I wear the hijab, I stand out more. And I notice I get a lot more direct discrimination, a lot of direct violence if I wear that. People are not so afraid to approach me when I’m wearing regular clothes.”

Amber’s Navajo family has been accepting and respectful of her choice. Other Navajos have a harder time reconciling a face that looks familiar with a head covering that seems foreign.

A Navajo woman approached Amber in a store recently and said, “Are you Indian? Are you Navajo? Why do you wear that scarf?”

“It’s for religion,” Amber said.

“Religion? What’s the religion?”

“I’m a Muslim,” Amber replied.

“You’re not Muslim. You’re not Arab. You’re Navajo. You’re a lost child.”

Amber is amused by some of the questions she is asked: How do you pray? Does that mean you’re married?

Others don’t ask questions. They just stare.

“They just look at me. I think they want to ask questions but I think they’re afraid that they might offend me.”

One day. One piece of cloth.

“It’s a sign of dedication to my religion. Completely practicing the religion. Doing what the Quran says we have to do and just being a good Muslim. I want people to know that I’m Muslim and that I’m proud to be Muslim and you can see it just by wearing my scarf. This is my religion. It’s who I am and who I grew up as.

“I’m fully happy. I’m happy with the way that I was raised. Who I am,” she said.



Marla Brose/Albuquerque Journal

Twenty-year-old Amber Tom, a Navajo Muslim, is seen at the Gallup mosque, Friday, Sept. 26, in Gallup. Tom’s decision to begin wearing a hijab, the women’s head covering that is prescribed in the Quran, was a public statement of something Tom had never hidden from her Navajo friends and classmates at Gallup High School, but something she had never advertised, either.

# Unofficial results of tribe election announced

By Eloise Ogden  
Minot Daily News

NEW TOWN, N.D. — The unofficial results of the Three Affiliated Tribes’ general election held Tuesday have been announced.

The tallying of votes by the tribal Election Board continued through the night after the polls closed Tuesday and until about mid-morning Wednesday, in the 4 Bears Casino Events Center west of New Town.

The final notice of results will be prepared through the tribal Election Board, tribal Legal Department and the Office of the Three Affiliated Tribes Executive Secretary V. Judy Brugh.

The unofficial results are as follows:

A swearing-in ceremony will be held today at 11 a.m. in the 4 Bears Casino Events Center for the top vote-getters for the New Town-Little Shell Segment and White Shield Segment.

Vance Gillette, new tribal chief judge, will also be officially sworn in today. The ceremony is open to everyone.

Voters of the Three Affiliated Tribes also decided whether or not to hold a secretarial election on the continued use of “lineal descendency” versus “blood quantum” as the primary criteria for membership in the Three Affiliated Tribes.

There were 1,306 Yes votes and 593 No votes.

In the Mandaree segment, a new

primary election was held Tuesday for council representative. The general election for that segment will be held Tuesday, Dec. 2 in the Water Chief Hall in Mandaree, with voting from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. In accordance with a Fort Berthold District Court order issued Oct. 20, the Sept. 16 Mandaree election was declared void and the new primary election was ordered.

The two top vote-getters in the primary election will move on to the general election.

## Casino might ax bonuses; no job cuts are planned

By Heather Allen  
New London Day

NEW LONDON, Conn. — The already frayed nerves of employees at Foxwoods Resort Casino were again strained Wednesday as the company’s president told those gathered that a decision about year-end bonuses has been put on hold.

Following a stressful month that brought widespread layoffs to the casino, employees are reportedly jittery about not receiving the annual bonus and anxious that more layoffs could follow.

In several of the employee meetings that were held at Foxwoods throughout the day Wednesday, Barry Cregan, interim president of Foxwoods, told those gathered that a decision about the bonuses will be made by December, according to Sandra Rios, a casino spokeswoman.

When asked about a rumor circulating that more layoffs will be coming in January, Cregan said that none are planned, Rios said.

But he did add that “economic conditions dictate

business decisions” and that there is no way of knowing if management will be forced to make business decisions as a result of economic conditions, Rios said.

“There’s no planned lay-off. People, they hear things,” she said. “They’re not accurate.”

The state’s Department of Labor has not been informed of any additional layoffs at Foxwoods, said spokeswoman Nancy Steffens.

But Rios did acknowledge that employees “are nervous.”

An employee who has worked at the casino for nine years said Wednesday that while management disputed the rumors of layoffs, workers remain anxious.

“There’s a buzz about it,” said the employee, who did not want to be identified for fear of retribution.

The employee said his wife was recently laid off from her job at another company and said he’s fearful that he could be next.

“It’s very unfortunate,” he said. “You feel like there’s nowhere to go.”

The year has proved diffi-

cult for Foxwoods and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, which owns the casino, as economic conditions in the region and the gaming industry in general continue to worsen.

Word went out to employees on Sept. 30 that 700 layoffs were expected to affect employees at both Foxwoods and MGM Grand at Foxwoods in various departments.

Employees who were laid off were notified about 2? weeks later.

Rios said the number of people who were actually laid off was around 400, with about 150 people voluntarily leaving their jobs at the casino and the remaining number of jobs being attained through attrition.

That point was made in the employee meetings as well.

Prior to October’s layoffs, another 100 or so Foxwoods employees had been laid off and 170 tribal government employees were offered buy-outs or laid off in an effort to trim \$40 million from the tribal government budget earlier in the year.

## Couple killed girl, then applied for child welfare, told court

CBC News

CANADA — A five-year-old Manitoba girl suffered months of abuse before dying at the hands of her mother and the mother’s boyfriend — who then covered up the slaying before applying for welfare in the dead child’s name, a Winnipeg jury has heard.

Human remains, believed those of Phoenix Sinclair, 5, were found on the Fisher River reserve, 150 kilometres north of Winnipeg in 2006. It is believed she was killed in 2005, although the body was not discovered until months later.

Phoenix’s biological mother, Samantha Kematch, and Kematch’s former boyfriend, Karl McKay, have pleaded not guilty to charges of first-degree murder.

In his opening statement to jurors Wednesday, Crown attorney Rick Saull alleged both Kematch and McKay were equally responsible for the forcible confinement, abuse and death of the child.

“This little girl died as the result of months of abuse,” Saull said. “After the final

blows were administered, she was left to die on a cold basement floor.”

Sinclair spent most of her young life in foster care before being placed back with her mother in 2004. Court was told she died on June 11, 2005, but was not reported missing until nine months later.

Saull told jurors the Crown will show the girl suffered dozens of injuries between April and June 2005 while she was in the couple’s care.

He said Kematch and McKay made a feeble attempt to revive the child, even though they were just a few kilometres from a medical facility. After the girl died, he said, her plastic-wrapped body was buried in a wooded area, using a neighbour’s shovel.

Later the couple applied for and received welfare payments in Phoenix’s name.

Eventually McKay showed the burial spot to RCMP, which by then was covered in snow.

The couple’s trial is expected to last until mid-December.