

Local News

Salmon River: NYS To Cut Tuition Aid For Natives Off The Reservation

by Doug Buchanan

The Salmon River Central school system may be facing more cuts to its educational programs next year as a result of the New York State Education Department's decision to halt tuition payments for approximately two hundred Mohawk students attending there. The students in question are not living within the boundaries of the American side of the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation.

According to BOCES District Superintendent David DeSantis, the Commissioner of Education for New York State is only responsible for paying tuition fees to local school districts for students living on Indian Reservations.

A recent internal audit of the State Education Department, according to DeSantis, revealed that the department is currently paying tuition to Salmon River for two hundred students while, according to the letter of the law, it is not bound to do so. Of these students, approximately 150 reside north of the U.S./Canada border, while the remainder live in the United States, but not on the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation. As of September 1, 1996, the state will no longer pay for these students.

Roughly speaking, this could mean a loss of revenue for the district of anywhere from

\$360,000 to nearly half a million dollars per year.

"The problem," says DeSantis, who currently heads up a committee in charge of making recommendations on this matter to the State Education Department, "is compounded by the fact that Salmon River is one of the poorest school districts in New York State. So any loss of money is going to have the potential of impacting the education programs for all the children in the district."

While Salmon River Board of Education President Marion Elliott insists that the district is seeking other avenues to recoup the lost revenue, she admits that there really are no other sources of money available to the district.

In July of 1995, Deputy Commissioner of Education James Kadamus told newly-hired Salmon River Superintendent of Schools Michael Singleton that the state would not pay for the students outside the reservation as of the 1995/1996 school year. The department relented, however, and gave the district a one year grace period. That year is coming to a close, however, and the district will almost certainly be forced to make more cuts to its educational programs for the 1996/1997 school year.

Tribe Adopts New Elections and Voting Regulations

SAINT REGIS MOHAWK RESERVATION (April 24, 1996) - When Mohawk voters head to the polls June 1 for the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's annual election they will be following guidelines put forth in the new tribal Elections and Voting Regulations Act.

The Act, which was passed by the Tribal Council at its legislative session on April 18, is designed to "Provide uniform and consistent procedures for the management of the . . . tribal election process in accord with the election provisions of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Constitution," according to the Act.

The members of the Tribe's Election Board, Melvin White, Rick Terrance and Alma Ransom, have worked over the past few months to develop the regulations. After numerous community meetings and various drafts of the regulations, the final draft was presented to the Tribal Council and became law when the Council and the Tribal Chief Executive adopted it through resolution.

Tribal members are encouraged to read the regulations and may obtain a copy of the documents from the Tribal Clerk's office during normal business hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

While many of the regulations further outline parts of the Constitution or simply formalize the elections procedures and customs which the Tribe has used for years, there are a number of provisions which bring about significant change in the tribe's electoral process.

Specifically, those provisions deal with the Tribal Caucus, eligibility of candidates, and absentee ballots.

The Tribal Caucus, which has traditionally been held two weeks before the election, will now be held on the first Saturday in May. The caucus will be run by the Election Board, instead of the Tribal Council, which has run the caucus in years past.

This year, the caucus will be held May 4, at 10 a.m. in the lobby of the community building. Anyone who is eligible to vote in the tribal election "has the right to propose or second the nomination of any duly qualified person...."

according to the regulations.

Nominated candidates must "establish his or her eligibility by completing and executing a sworn statement that he or she fulfills the eligibility requirements contained (in the regulations)." If a candidate wishes to withdraw from the election, he or she must do so by filing a "Notice of Withdrawal" with the Election Board.

Candidate eligibility has changed under the new regulations. In order to run for Chief or Vice Chief, a candidate must; be at least 30 years old; be an enrolled member of the Tribe; "Have resided on the U.S. portion of the reservation or live south of the U.S./Canada border and reside within a designated land claims area for more than one year; have been nominated by two tribally enrolled members; and not have been convicted of a felony under the major crimes act with the past five years," according to the regulations.

Tribal Council and Tribal Clerk candidates must meet the same criteria with the exception of the age requirement. The candidates for these positions need only be 25 years old.

The eligibility requirement for Judicial Branch positions are outlined in the Constitution, however, the regulations go one step further by requiring judge candidates to meet the same residency requirement as the other elected officials.

Another important aspect of the regulations is the addition of an absentee ballot. "Absentee ballots will be provided upon written request for those eligible voters who are away at school, in the hospital, working away or presently residing off the reservation or under any other condition which prohibit their voting in person," the regulations say.

Other areas outlined in the regulations include: voters list, voting procedures, ballot counting procedures, swearing-in ceremonies, removal/vacancy from office, referendum procedures, initiative procedures, special elections, recall, and voting machines and electronic voting.

For more information on the Tribe's Elections and Voting Regulations, or to obtain a copy of the regulations, contact the Tribal Clerk's office at (518) 358-2272.

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