

April 21, 2005

Dear Senator Wyden:

I'm writing to you in support of Lane Community College's Longhouse Project. Specifically, Lane Community College Foundation's application for a \$350,000 federal appropriation from the Housing and Urban Development, Economic Initiative (EDI) to support construction of a Longhouse on main campus needs your support. You should do everything in your power to support the building of this structure. As you know, a large part of the dark underside of U.S. history is the wars that the U.S. waged with the peoples of this land.

This history has had a continuing effect upon Indians. Among all groups, Indians continue to have lowest graduation rates from colleges. It is not for lack of access. Harvard, for instance, has long welcomed Indians. Indeed, unlike other minorities who have had to fight to get education, American Indians have had often to fight to be freed from education of a certain sort, i.e. the sort that left them a stranger to their own people (at best) and an enemy to their own people (at the worst).

What this has to do with L.C.C. Longhouse is direct and simple for a longhouse is like having a branch tribe on the college property. Let me explain. LCC, with its main campus in Eugene, has long operated branch campuses in Florence and Cottage Grove. A longhouse serves a reverse purpose. It provides a tribal branch on a college campus. Every Indian nation—and especially those local nations that have contributed part of the \$144,000.00 donated by tribes to the LCC Longhouse Project—will be extended onto LCC campus via the construction of a longhouse. The LCC Longhouse will symbolize and embody a tribal presence for LCC students.

The comfort derived from such structures is sometimes quite dramatic. I know a student, for instance, whose successful graduation from an institute of higher education depended upon the presence of a longhouse on campus. His story, not unfamiliar to Indians, was largely a story of alienation and frustration among the standard curricula and disciplines of an English-speaking university. Without going into details, suffice it to say that he had become so removed from his major department and the university as a whole that he could not imagine a place on campus to hold his doctoral dissertation. It wasn't until a family member mentioned the longhouse as a possibility that he saw a way to succeed, or rather, to avoid sabotaging his success. Literally, the only building on campus in which this person could imagine holding a defense was the Longhouse. The Longhouse had long provided this student with refuge while on campus. It had been a place of community and family. He had eaten at innumerable potlucks in the Longhouse. He'd seen friends and relatives often in that Longhouse. He'd even gotten to hear the wild shout of Bingo in that Longhouse. His defense was scheduled and held and he passed successfully. I know this to be true because I was there. That student was yours truly. The only option available to my imagination other than the Longhouse was a room at a branch campus several hours away. The defense, if it had been approved at such a distant locale, would, of course, been a second-rate sort of defense. Because my alma mater had a longhouse, this Siletz scholar was promoted at the end of years of graduate study from a dipped down defense to a standard issue graduation.

Tribes have supported the LCC Longhouse Project financially; tribes will also support the Longhouse by prayers and blessings. All students at LCC will benefit from having an umbilicus formed to tribal destinations from a Native American Longhouse here at LCC.

Yours Truly,

Drew Viles, Instructor
Lane Community College

Cc Senator Gordon Smith
Congressman Peter DeFazio
Lane Community College Foundation