

Ponca Tribe requests new bone inventory

BY LINDSAY YOUNG
Senior staff writer

The Southern Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma is demanding that UNL reconstruct its entire inventory of American Indian remains.

The tribe has the right to make the request under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

The university submitted its Notices of Inventory Completion to the National Park Service Sept. 30, in accordance with a Sept. 1 agreement that the university would return all remains to their respective tribes.

After the inventories are submitted to the service, they are published in the federal register for 30 days to allow tribes to challenge the inventories or parts of the repatriation process.

Randy Thomas, a representative of the Southern Ponca tribe, said he had seen the university's inventory Sept. 28 when he accompanied UNL researchers to assure they did not harm or remove remains.

He said he saw in a box the skull of a 60-year-old man and part of a 6-week-old child in the same box. It was that and other observations that led him to suspect the inventory was inaccurate.

NAGPRA, signed into law in 1990, required museums, federal agencies and institutions, including those that accept federal funds such as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, to

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RANDY THOMAS
Southern Ponca Tribe representative

inventory human remains and associated funerary objects to the National Park Service by November 1995.

Thomas sent papers to Vice Chancellor for Research Priscilla Grew on Wednesday requesting that a new inventory be done. Grew said the university has not completed a response to the request.

Thomas faxed copies of the request to tribes Thursday and had not heard a response from them. But, Thomas said, the other tribes involved in the repatriation expected him to make the request.

He said even though the Southern Ponca's request may slow the repatriation, it needed to be done.

"I think what's going to happen here is we're going to end up putting everything on hold," Thomas said. "We want our ancestors returned to the proper tribes. If it means doing this, so be it."

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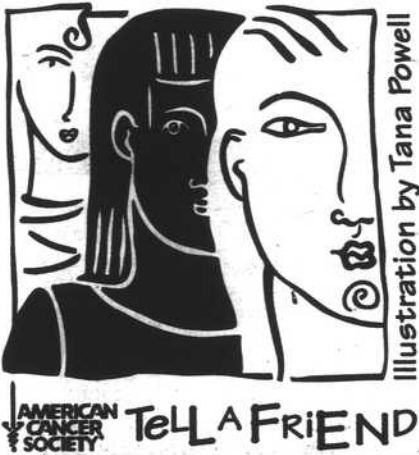


Illustration by Tana Powell

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Local, long distance carriers split on 414

PHONE from page 1

Association and the Nebraska Farm Bureau.

Phil Young, director of the campaign against the initiative, said his organization's efforts have focused on spreading the group's message: Initiative 414 would mean higher phone bills for Nebraskans.

"They're kind of saying 'wink, wink; nod, nod. Trust us, we'll lower your phone bills,'" he said.

But Young said his group has been working uphill against a well-funded initiative campaign that started five weeks before his group was formed.

Young said it would not be possible for his group to counter advertising in favor of Initiative 414 with only its own advertisements because of his shortage in funding compared with AT&T's support.

He said his group will continue to rally Nebraskans by holding public forums and sending out pamphlets, as well as by creating radio and television spots.

Telephone access fees, which would be regulated by the amendment, are a large source of income for local telephone companies.

Bailey, Lauerman and Associates, a Lincoln law firm, is coordinating the efforts of Nebraskans to Protect our Phone Service.

Local companies such as Aliant Communications, charge fees to long-distance providers such as AT&T to use local telephone lines and telecommunications networks.

The cost to the long distance companies is in turn paid for by callers when they pay their long-distance bills.

Pam Hunziker, executive vice president of Bailey and Lauerman, said small telephone companies generate a larger percentage of their revenue from higher access fees because a smaller number of users are covering costs of service.

Hunziker said the group's opposition stems from three points:

■ There is no guarantee that the

lower cost from reduced access fees would be fairly passed on to telephone users. Long-distance providers would be able to continue charging the same rates, and keep the savings for themselves.

■ Local companies would have to raise other fees to make up for the loss in revenue.

■ The initiative process is being used improperly by an out-of-state entity to change Nebraska statute.

Todd Baustert, operations director for Yes for Lower Phone Bills, said rural telephone companies would be exempt from having to charge lower access rates because of how the initiative would work with current state law.

He also said the savings to long distance providers would be required by the proposed statute to pass savings on to their customers.

Baustert said the large number of signatures on the initiative petition — more than 124,000 names were submitted and 84,000 verified by the secretary of state's office — combined with the support of several community organizations, shows the initiative really is by Nebraskans for Nebraskans.

He said AT&T has been very generous to fund a campaign that other groups do not have the resources to finance.

Young said the Public Service Commission, which is responsible for regulating telecommunications in Nebraska, already has proposed a plan to reduce access rates while making sure all of Nebraska's telephone users can take advantage of the savings.

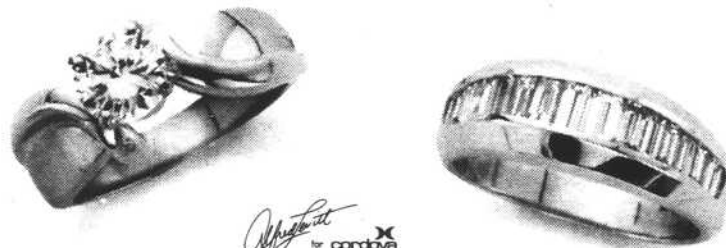
The commission voted this week to oppose Initiative 414 on the grounds that it would not sufficiently manage the effects of cutting access rates in the state.

Young and Baustert both said Nebraska voters would make the right decision about how to manage telephone companies in the state in the face of federal deregulation.

"The question is how to make sure Nebraska maintains the best service in the nation," Young said.



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