

“Caring for people in a good way. Listening with a kind heart. Leading with a strong spirit.”

Bozho PBPB Members, my name is Charissa Wahwasuck-Jessepe and I’m asking for your consideration for the position of Tribal Council Secretary in the upcoming Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation 2022 Election. I am the granddaughter of Arlene Wahwasuck (Shipshee) and the late Francis “Big Man” Wahwasuck. My maternal grandfather was the late Thurman “Dutch” Shopteese. My paternal grandparents were the late Sarah (Pemma) Jessepe and Francis “Bud” Jessepe. My roots are strong with our Potawatomi heritage. My given name is Zii-Bii-Kwe. I’m the first-born daughter of Carol Shopteese and Kenneth “Shon” Jessepe. My color is Blue and I’m Fish Clan. As a Tribal member, I feel a deep responsibility to use my experience, knowledge, and network to help our people, and to advance and strengthen our Nation. As your next Tribal Council Secretary my hope is to ensure that the future we’re creating for our ancestors is one where they are cared for and thriving.

A Rez Kid

Growing up on the Kickapoo Reservation, I’ve been fortunate to learn and live by many of our Traditional lifeways from drum doings to Native American Church, and still actively participate in Kennekuk church services. I’m proud of the fact that I grew up a Rez Kid. My story, my being, my Spirit, all comes from that place – Home. We all know that being Indigenous is hard, but what I hope to contribute to our Nation is to find ways to help amplify, resonate, and grow the parts of being Indigenous that are beauty – our resilience, our strength, our grace, our collective power.

Mission and Vision

With my background in Cultural Anthropology, I’m experienced and knowledgeable in using cultural values and Traditional knowledge as an asset and foundation for how I approach my work. In my master’s program in Public Administration at the University of Kansas, I was able to gain tools to ensure the work I’m doing is effective, efficient, and equitable. This combined background allows me to create and inform systems and policies that are grounded in cultural values while also evaluating whether those systems are working. My passion has been and will continue to be - to build pathways that are created by our People, for our People – **caring for people in a good way**. Far too long have outsiders told us that they ‘know best’ and come in with impractical and bad ideas. Far too long has Western society silenced us, told us to get back in our place, and forced us to do it their way. As Tribal Council Secretary, I would seek to elevate the solutions and tools we already have to help each other – I would seek to be a resource, a tool, to help envision and create a future where we put community, Traditional values, and ancestral wisdom first! I believe our Nation can be a model for how Indigenous People can thrive using our own lifeways, knowledge, and values as a guide – and I have the experience to help us achieve just that!

Walking the Walk

With over ten years’ experience across private, public, and not-for-profit sectors I’m confident I can help us achieve our goals. Most recently, as the Co-Director of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, I successfully managed a coalition of five southwestern Tribes to petition the Biden Administration to designate the 1.36 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument, set a precedence for Tribal sovereignty

as the first Tribal led effort to achieve equal decision-making powers over off-reservation lands, and led the organization through several trying circumstances including the COVID-19 pandemic, a hostile political environment, and executive and staff turnover.

Leading with a strong spirit enabled me to directly oversee and manage 15 program budgets including a 2-million annual organizational budget. My responsibilities and accomplishments are as follows:

Manage 20 internal processes including: (1) quality and assurance control, (2) communications with elected Tribal leaders, Foundation staff, congressional and advocacy allies, and collaborating partners, (3) facilitation of decision-making including budget, strategic planning, and programming.

Oversee 50 external processes: (1) public relations including a national ad campaign and monument restoration activities, (2) fundraising with a personal portfolio of over \$500,000 in committed annual funding, (3) 20+ partner relationships including Native American Rights Fund, Udall Institute, Americans for Indian Opportunity, and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and (4) political and advocacy portfolios in the areas of: Tribal governance and self-determination, conservation and environment, cultural and natural resource management, and intergovernmental relations.

Lastly, I built and managed programming in: (1) youth and peer mentoring, (2) community engagement and education, (3) marketing and merchandise, (4) budget preparation and approval, (5) information technology, (6) development and strategic planning, (7) human resource management, and (8) contracting and procurement services.

My experience in start-up development in the private sector has made me into a well-rounded operations and management professional, as I assisted in the ramp-up and opening of a first-of-its-kind 17-acre health and wellness campus in Liberty, Missouri. While there, I supported the creation and implementation of organizational policies and procedures and co-led community acquisitions and compliance control for other Action Pact properties. This experience built upon my skills as an already fast-learner, but also made me adept at looking at issues from the larger picture and connecting the dots so that on-the-ground activities are aligned to meet the larger vision. This ability has fostered a strong sense of strategic planning and visioning as a key tenet to my leadership style; always ensuring that what we're doing today benefits those tomorrow.

Lastly, I wouldn't have come as far as I have today without **listening with a kind heart**. Another key tenet of my leadership is extending and reciprocating what's given to me. Mentoring is a large part of my leadership and I wholeheartedly believe in reaching back and helping our younger Relatives succeed. Our Traditional teachings tell us to not have an ego about ourselves and that, 'what we do is never for us, it's always for seven generations ahead.' I could not be where I am today if others had not extended their hand and walked with me to learn, grow, and heal. I carry that value with me and would look to instill this is my time serving the Nation. Our Nation is only as strong as our young ones – let's help them thrive!

Authentic, transparent, dedicated; Charissa for Secretary!

If elected, I would humbly serve you and our Nation, leading with authenticity, transparency, and

dedication, always ensuring that my decisions and actions are in the best interest of our Nation. My term would not be filled with checking boxes, empty 'yeses,' or ivory tower politics where I'm inaccessible or can't be reached.

-Authentic- My term would not be a popularity contest. I recognize that change does not come easy, and from that I have come to thrive in a place of discomfort. I'm adept at navigating complex situations and am keen at facilitating complicated spaces with diplomacy and grace. I'm not afraid to have hard conversations, be the naysayer, or to critique an idea until I'm sure it's the right choice. Conversely, I know when it's advantageous to listen and take a back seat to evaluate the issue objectively. My promise is to have an open-door policy, welcome spaces of dialogue and differing opinion, and evaluate the issues and decisions placed in front of me from an impartial perspective, a place that benefits the Nation and not myself as an individual person. Lastly, I'm not afraid to admit when I've made a mistake and view them as an opportunity to learn and grow. When I mess up, I won't make an attempt to cover it up or hide it, I will be honest and remain committed to fixing or bettering my mishap until the issue is resolved.

-Transparency- I hope to bring more transparency to our governing body by increasing access to information such as showing how we vote as individual Tribal Council Members and ensuring the Minutes accurately reflect discussion of issues. I would evaluate the effectiveness of our communications to our Tribal members and ensure that you have better access to how decisions are made. I would make community engagement and education a priority and meet with people to listen to challenges, suggestions, and ideas. I would host information sessions regarding specific issue areas and would implement a regular meeting time so that Tribal members have better access to myself and could get answers and solutions – think 'Coffee with Charissa' and/or 'Third Thursdays' where we can come together over lunch and discuss what's on your mind.

-Dedicated- My collective work experience demonstrates my qualities of dependability, dedication, organization, critical thinking, and creativity as evidenced by my leadership roles. If I tell you I'll do something, I'll do it and if I can't we'll brainstorm ideas on how to move forward. I'm hardworking and often go above and beyond what is expected of me. I've become a dynamic worker that excels in different environments, from manual labor working on a fence for conservation to representing my organizations at venues such as NCAI and the U.S. Congress; I'm comfortable getting my hands dirty and wearing a blazer when the times call for it. When I agree to take something on, I stick with it from start to finish.

My hopes are that my term leaves my people better off, and with the knowledge and satisfaction that I did everything in my power to serve my people to the best of my ability – I hope I can count on your vote to hold me to it!

Let's connect, have coffee, or catch up over Potawatomi stew:

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