

The difference between a leader and a politician



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I would like to begin this article with the difference between a leader and a politician. A leader is a person who guides or directs a group. A politician is a seeker or holder of public office who is more concerned about winning favor or retaining power than about maintaining principles. I never want to be known as a politician. I want to be known and remembered as a leader for this tribe and my community. I ran for this seat to bring my education and 10 years experience of working for all three areas of the tribe to lead this tribe into a better future.

I spent less than \$1,000 on my campaign because I knew most of my support would come from my reputation. I am respected in my community and by my past co-workers. They know that when I believe in something I will fight for it and I do what I say and stand for. The reason I am writing about this is because some people do not live in my community and do not know me as well as others. I want people to know that I am fighting for what is right, whatever it costs me. If people do not think I am doing my job, then they will vote me out. As much as I love working for my tribe, I can and would find other employment even if it meant two jobs.

The point I am making is that I will never sell my soul to the devil. I am not worrying about

what someone will hold over my head for the next election. That mind set leads to so much distraction that you have a hard time doing your job.

As most of you have probably already heard, the tribe is facing a \$1.7 million cut in funding due to sequestration. We have been meeting with our division directors to ask for them to try and cut at least 5 percent of their budgets without cutting services or jobs. Our divisions have been very generous and cooperative. This is not an easy task for them because each area has needs, whether it be equipment, supplies, training, etc. I am very proud of this team approach.

At this same time we need a \$1.3 million software upgrade that has to happen this year. We are seeking savings from the casino and financing options to go forward with this need.

I will never support cutting front line employees if it comes down to cutting positions. Our front line is our lifeline and if it were not for them, we would not be where we are today. This organization has been top heavy for years. It is time to reorganize and run more efficiently. I do not care who is related to whom and who has been here for 10-25 years or what the reason is. We have a job to do and a business to run because our people depend on the services our enterprises allow us.

I feel some people have rode the gravy train for years and bring nothing to the table. This does not teach our members anything.

Two things that come to mind are leadership and respect. If you don't lead who is going to respect you? All this results in terrible team member morale, which results in terrible customer service. We preach to our team members and send them to customer service training yearly but if we don't lead and give them tools to do their job what are we doing?

In just the 10 years I have worked in the casino, there has been so much change. The team-

work that once existed is gone. I take all of this personally. These people are my family. Some have given us many years and do not have the ability to move up in the organization. They still come to work and do their job. Just so everyone understands, the CASINOS were down \$7 MILLION last year. What are we doing to turn the ship around? We have a threat of a new casino across the bridge. I hope that people understand why breathing life back into the lifeblood is my priority. I am not trying to work against anyone but if you are not part of the solution, then you don't belong here. Team members in any work environment should not hate to come to work.

These last few months have been very trying to me as a board member. Some days I feel like I could help more people in my last job than I can now. People think that the board has so much power — maybe in years past or certain directors. I am not looking for power, just an avenue to make things right. The political climate is not good. We have people in fear of being targeted, threat of removal petitions, bullying, etc., when you question things or do not share the "right" opinions. It really makes me sick that people have to worry about these things since it is our right to ask questions and to have differences of opinions. I have nothing to hide and no family members to protect so I say, "bring it."

One obvious item of contention is the proposed constitution. I wrote about it in one of my unit reports and I never had one call, email, text or letter telling me that they supported spending more money than the \$500,000 that had already been spent. Some times in life, it is better to cut your losses than to bury yourself. Who does not agree there could be amendments made, oh yeah, that was the original intent, not a new document.

At this time, we are looking for things to cover government cuts to our programs and casinos

are down \$7 million. What should our priorities be? I work for the people, but I fear that many do not realize what is at stake here. If we were in the black and had Lansing and New Boston up and running, it would be a different story.

It is not all about money, either. I would rather spend time on fixing the assets that we have and creating new revenue sources than keeping someone's campaign promises. I have many relatives who live in the "at large" area who have never said the tribe doesn't care about us. People move away to go to college, find work, move closer to family, etc. We don't begrudge them for doing what they need to do. The people who choose to live in the U.P. just because they can get services does not mean they have an easy life. There are limited good paying jobs, nasty weather, limited opportunities for specialized health care, etc.

We all make choices. Part of the problem is someone has created a divide that keeps getting bigger between the service area and the "at large." The "at large" claim to be the voice of the people and want the constitution at all costs and to cut the board salaries. The service area is not demanding the proposed constitution or lowering our salaries. No wonder board members struggle because there are two groups with different opinions who we both represent. The board salary will be a target as well as re-election with leverage for the proposed constitution.

Things that also need to be considered are, according to the Nov. 1, 2000, meeting minutes, there was a motion by Payment, supported by Lumsden to set the board pay at \$67,000. They were both receiving their board pay and executive director and deputy director salaries. This was also supposed to include a yearly 3 percent increase, which, as discussed by the chairman this past fall during balancing the 2013 budget review session,

should currently be \$92,000. I do not support the board be paid \$92,000, but just wanted to point out the board has made concessions.

The last thing I want to mention was that when James Mills (Creating Stronger Nations) came to the Sault on Sept. 24 and 25, 2012, to train the board on roles and responsibilities, he said he did not support having three branches of government. He said it was not working for the United States and other tribes. He also suggested raising the 100 signatures for referendum based on the size of the current membership.

Many of you may only learn about what is going on in the tribe through the newspaper or social media. I encourage you to keep your ears open and ask questions because sometimes you can believe in someone so much you can't see what really is going on.

One of my campaign promises was that I supported a separation of powers. Now that I am privy to more information, that really could be a double-edged sword. We all have members who call us to help them with their ACFS cases or tribal court cases or fines. So do we separate and not be able to help our members? The last board meeting was a prime example: a member told us that there are numerous issues with tribal court and the board supervises them, so we better straighten it out. If the court was separated we wouldn't be able to. Everything is not as black and white as we would like it to be or perceive it to be.

Another campaign promise was for me to establish a scholarship. Interested Unit III members who are graduating may email me at bsorenson@saulttribe.net for an application. As always, feel free to stop in during my office hours on Friday from 9 to 11 a.m. or call or email me.

I look forward to less drama and less negativity. Surround yourself with positive people and laugh as much as you can.