

TRUTH BE TOLD – and I told you I would tell you



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Election season is upon us and the mudslinging will begin.

The chairperson is rallying candidates to fit his agenda. I bet he told each of the candidates that he supports them because he truly just wants anybody but the incumbents, except one in Unit I. I actually wish each of the candidates would have the opportunity to sit on the board. I truly believe 85 percent of them would be surprised at what is really involved in being a member of this board. Some of the misconceptions are:

- The board is not a full-time job — the board is a full-time job. The board meets every Tuesday, with two meetings well into the night, two Mondays with financials, two Wednesdays with semi-annual reviews and gaming authority workshops, appeals hearings, gaming expansions meetings, elders meetings, unit meetings, office hours, committee meetings, state and national conferences. This does not include time directors spend traveling to these meetings, all the information that is read to be prepared for the meetings or the number of phone calls, text messages, emails or Facebook posts that members are contacting you with questions or concerns.

- The board is always fighting — the entire board rarely agrees on everything and, if they did, the members would call us bobble heads. We all come to the table with different backgrounds and opinions of what is important to their specific unit and the entire membership. When we do disagree on things, the majority state their case, take their vote and we move on. The chairperson is the one who holds your vote against you. He uses it for political purposes all the time. If any of you have watched the Livestream when he disrespected elder Unit V Representative Joan Carr-Anderson, because she voted to allow an investigation into a matter of the chairperson asking for election information that our team members were not comfortable giving out. So now I ask, if you are not guilty why would you be against an investigation? Mr. Chairperson labeled it “a criminal investigation,” that was not out of the board’s mouth, but his own.

- The board is doing back-room deals — the majority of the board has lunch in the Signatures Bar and does sometimes discuss areas of concern or proposed legislation. There is never a vote taken. When I first got on the

board, a group of seven or so of us had lunch at the Dogpatch in Munising prior to our meeting. The chairperson was a part of that group and he brought a copy of the organization chart and wanted support to pass it that evening. What is the difference? Recently the board was made aware through Facebook posts that the fishing and hunting license fees were going to now be \$5 instead of \$15. This information NEVER was discussed with the board to lower the fees. The chairperson made this decision saying it was within his authority to do so. He said the Conservation Committee supported it and we had money coming in from the BIA. He had already planned a press release and the board was totally unaware. This decision cost the tribe and the inland department approximately \$24,000. There is not a board member who would love to lower fees to members, but we also need to be fiscally responsible. When departments receive tribal support and they receive new funding, that funding can replace tribal support and can then be used in other areas. This department has three team members very much stretched thin that could use two to three additional staff members. My point is that the board supports our treaty rights and charging reasonable fees, but the board was never even approached to ask for input and weigh the factors. So my concern is why the chairperson feels this decision is within his authority when he will not even make a decision to donate a \$50 tribal flag without approval from the board to do so, but spent \$24,000. This is pure politics because there should be a budget modification coming to the board for approval of the decrease in revenue and if the board does not approve it, the board will be the “big bad board.”

- The board does not work with the chairperson — this is probably the worst fabrication. I can attest that when I came on this board, I had a very open mind and supported the chairperson. After witnessing some things, such as telling me that an individual would not want a position permanently and that person did indeed get the position with an additional \$20,000 that was apparently buried in a resolution that the board voted on. I know a few of us must have been drinking the Kool-Aid or concentrating on the proposed savings and not seeing the increase. After a few times of that and constant spinning of facts and words, I had seen the light. This does not mean that I am against the chairperson; it means that I approach everything with suspicion. Anybody who is around the board knows what really goes on. We absolutely try to work together and some days are better than others but it is not the board that can’t play in the sandbox. Nothing is off the table when it comes to politics with this person. Smearing you, your family,

elders, women, the culture, you name it. It is not about the tribe, it is about “will you support me and my agenda, and if you don’t, I have something on each of you and I will make your life hell.” That is the life of a board member under this chairperson.

We need change — the change is needed by the chairperson, leave the past in the past. Learn from it and move on. What is different from 2004-2008? The same empty promises, except maybe “twice the chair, half the pay” or the elders will get \$3,000. Here is the change. The chairperson rarely attends the monthly elders meetings. One elder asked where he was and was told he was in D.C. The elder said, “If he doesn’t start coming to these meetings, he will be in D.C. permanently.” The majority of the members in the service area are getting fed up and, as the chairperson points out, 64 percent of the membership is not in the U.P., so who do you think he manipulates?

The voice of the people — If you do a survey using survey monkey and offer a \$1,000 incentive to take the survey and you get 1,000 responses, is that really the voice of the people? First of all, how do you know if the person is a tribal member? Can you take the survey multiple times?

The board won the tribal lottery — funny thing is the chairperson also served on the board for many years, most drawing a large salary simultaneously. He was also on the board and, according to the minutes of 11-1-00, Director Payment, supported by Director Lumsden, voted to approve the increase in stipends for the board of directors as proposed, effective immediately. Prior to that, there was a memo from then Vice Chair Payment written (10-21-00) to Lumsden stating, “Review the following and let me know if you agree. The idea to break up the payments over time is a good one because it allows for the entire 5% retro to 1996 adjustment. Bernard’s retro pay will be \$80,000. Ours will be close to \$40,000 each. This should conclude my part of the raise structure. I want HR to put their stamp of approval on it. I do not want this coming back on us. It is your birthright to run this tribe with me as vice chair. Set the meeting up, I have gathered support. If we make the deal with him we are set. He’ll be on his way to Detroit.”

Another interesting thing is the minutes of 4-10-02 designating Bernard as the CEO of Greektown Casino and COO of Kewadin Casinos Gaming Authority, included was a \$350,000 base salary annually and bonus and benefit plans. The motion was carried including Payment. The minutes of 6-5-02 state, “Moved by Paquin, supported by Payment, to approve the minutes of 4-10-02.” It seems to me that someone was a huge player in these actions. The more members who get educated; the

more new voters are needed or empty promises.

We hear that the chairperson is so busy he can’t complete his dissertation for his doctorate degree. We are all busy, but less time spent on social media twisting facts and creating pandemonium is a good start. Another thing is the emails sent to the board in hate about their intentions by asking questions or by bringing resolutions forward. When most board members bring resolutions forward they are attacked, and if we are not bringing them forward we are not doing our job. The reason the membership has a hard time seeing the facts, is that emails of the board are confidential. Just this past weekend there was one directed at a director for pettiness and I had enough and said, “Mr. Chairperson, get a life!”

On Saturday, March 22, was the St. Ignace Family Fun Day coordinated by Shirley Goudreau. There was a large turnout of families enjoying food, prizes and activities from local and tribal agencies. The tribe had booths from Head Start, Housing, ACFS, YEA and Law Enforcement. Director Massaway and I donated money to purchase bikes and helmets. Thank you to Shirley and family, the tribal staff members and the community members for making this event a huge success!

On Friday, March 28, I attended the St. Ignace Tribal Head Start year end powwow. The kids were dressed in their ribbon shirts and shawls as they danced to the Mukkwa Giizeck drum. The Head Start does an awesome job with these kids. They give these children a running start to their formal education and additionally learn their language and culture.

On April 1, the Tribal Youth Council from all areas presented a power point to the board on what they do for community service and events. It was nice to see the large turnout of youth representing all areas coming together to get to know each other. The board was invited to have lunch with the group. Thank you to all the staff that lead and inspire our youth. You are making a difference in their lives.

On the same afternoon we met to discuss the progress of our TAP survey. It was proposed to do a random sample of tribal members. Most of the board present preferred it being sent to all members in the service area so we can see where the needs are. The costs will be coming back to the board to make the final decision.

On April 2, we had a semi-annual review on ACFS (social services). They manage 30 programs and served over 19,000 members last year including 1,126 members with heating assistance. The staff is working diligently to meet our member’s needs.

The latest lies are being construed to lead people to believe Director Massaway and myself have been intervening in the hir-

ing of a food and beverage director. The truth is, it couldn’t be further from the truth. Sometimes the one blaming is the one doing. In case you don’t know, here is how it works: he causes chaos and spreads lies and hopes to distract people from what he is really doing. It sometimes works because the victim has to spend so much time correcting the lies and defending themselves that their time is totally consumed.

We have so many issues facing our tribe such as declining casino revenues, grants ending, government cutbacks, suicides, drug and alcohol addictions, housing shortages, rising living expenses, etc. We do not need to be defending our votes or questions; we need to be taking action and planning for the future. Please use your voice with the chairperson and tell him to leave his politics in D.C. We are a tribe and we need to take care of our members and our businesses!

Please get educated and make wise choices. I ran stating, “I would tell the truth even if it wasn’t what you wanted to hear.”

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Contact me at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, bridgett91@yahoo.com, 643-2123 or 430-0536.