

# We need to prioritize and take action now



**BRIDGETT SORENSON,  
DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

This is my third year going through the budget cycle and this is the latest we have gone without approving a budget. We were supposed to review them the three days following the Hessel meeting on Nov. 19, but when that meeting was canceled for weather, the chair also canceled the budget reviews stating the staff didn't think we needed more than a few hours to pass a budget. It could take this board a few hours just to discuss one department, let alone to be ready to pass the whole budget in that time frame. It is best when we have already scheduled time to stick to it because re-scheduling can be a nightmare. The board has yet to even see the casino 2015 budgets.

I am hoping that one change that will happen is that the government will only take \$16 million from the casinos this year instead of \$17 million. People are always complaining about the conditions of the casino: outdated machines, furniture, décor, software, etc. When the capital expenditure budget continues to get cut and improvements cannot be made that is what happens. All businesses need to have money re-invested in them to succeed. We cannot continue to take, take, take, like we did with many of the hotels we owned and let them go to pot.

I am very excited that we have hired a temporary casino executive, Fred Buro. I am hoping the newspaper will print a biography on Mr. Buro. He comes to us with a wealth of experience and I feel we are very lucky to have him. Fred will be the eyes com-

ing from the outside with no ties from the inside to analyze operations and correct our deficiencies. Prior to presenting to the board, Fred had stopped at the St. Ignace, Christmas and Sault casinos so he could see things through the eyes of a customer.

The board did pass the 10 percent increase in insurance premiums to both the employee and employer. We were told by the insurance department that we would be facing a \$2.7 million shortfall if we did not support the increase. This was not an easy decision with no raises being given in so many years. We may need to look at other insurance options so we are not faced with this continuing shortfall every year.

I am not sure how our members feel but my opinion on using an "abstain" vote should only be for two reasons: A conflict of interest or if you were not there during the discussion and do not have enough information to cast a yes or no vote. I am involved in other committees and boards and "abstain" is not even a choice. When we first got on the board, when a director "abstained" the chair would call the person out. In the last month or so the chair was able to break the tie twice and abstained. We are all adults and can make our own decisions, but I feel that a decision should be made whether it is a director or the chair.

On the Hessel agenda was a Unit VI, Mackinac Band resolution, Open Enrollment Resolution, Mackinac Island Elder Sub-Committee Resolution and a resolution to comply with the newspaper unit report policy. When it came time for these resolutions, the chairman told the board he only placed them on the agenda as discussion items. The meeting agenda is for action items. He told the board if they did not have to motion or second them and they would die for lack of support. These games need to stop. Members see the notice of agenda and, if they are interested in a particular resolution, they may drive many miles to attend the meeting. If he wanted to discuss those items, then he should have asked the board's executive assistant to schedule them for a workshop. I realize that even when items are on the agenda,

they are sometimes tabled, but when you specifically ask for them to be discussed and tell the board not to motion or second so they die for lack of support, then you shouldn't have even added them in the first place.

I called the newspaper policy the "Bridgett Sorenson Resolution." Many of the chair's supporters do not like what I write and asked for him to do something about my articles. So, this resolution was added starting off claiming the board members are required to keep their members informed, which is in the Constitution, which was written before we had a newspaper, so it wasn't meant to require a unit report. Then it goes on to want to limit due to cost savings but how many color pictures get published every month? I do, however, feel everyone should write one, but that is their choice. What I think is crazy is that I have written a report every month since I have been on the board and there are usually some that don't, so even if I did use more than my allotted 1,900 words, doesn't it all balance out? I also believe when Mr. Payment was a board member and there was discussion on unit reports he said he had a right to keep the members informed. There will be some who do not like what I write, but there are many who do like what I write and I will continue to keep the members informed!

The chair also decided to set up a meeting with the elders on Mackinac Island and never once mentioned it to Director Massaway or myself. As the chair, he can meet with members anytime he wants, but I do not think it is very cooperative to go behind the directors from their own unit to meet and organize without even inviting or informing them. So, members, now you know why there are issues in Unit III. Does he go into other units and do this? This is not part of relationship or team building.

We also have a resolution in place that we will not interfere with Mackinac Bands recognition. I have no idea why there would be a resolution to do otherwise.

When we first got on the board, there was discussion about cleaning up the rolls, so I am not even sure why this item was

on there. My first thought was because of the coming election. I know there are people out there whom most of their family has cards and some of the siblings don't for various reasons. I did support the last resolution so that members who are over 18 but have not turned 21 can now get a card. I really did not want to support that because many people for how many years didn't get their card prior to 18 have no recourse. What burns my butt right now is why parents are not enrolling their minor children. They should have to have their cards to receive services. Parents need to be more accountable.

I am very frustrated as a board member and also as a tribal member right now. There are so many irons in the fire and we are sitting idle. The majority of the board either needs to stand up and grab the reins and say enough is enough or the chairman needs to be a leader and prioritize. We cannot get to anything else right now because budgets continue to loom out there. These departments and businesses cannot even plan for 2015 because they don't have an approved budget. We cannot continue down this path in 2015. I personally want to see action. We need to separate the chair and CEO on the government side so that the chair can continue to lobby and educate DC and we can continue to move forward with business as usual. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot consider himself a staff member of the executive team and serve on multiple federal committees. We have to cancel or change board meetings and other discussions because of these commitments. He is planning on changing our board meetings for 2015 because of his schedule. This brings up another discussion — his travel budget. He was approved for \$10,000 in 2014 and was supposedly over spent by March. We haven't seen any information on this. Budgets need modifications when they are overspent. The recent travel of the chair was approved out of the board budget. I was one of the "no" votes. I want to see this budget fixed. No other budgets are allowed to be overspent without coming to the board for modifications. I believe he wants to double that amount for

2015. What should be listed is approximate dates and names of the function and cost of the trip. Not just a dollar amount. I don't want to hear Bernard had a jet and a clothing allowance either. I wasn't on the board then and I can only be held accountable for what happens now. It might not be a bad idea to see what grants and funding we usually get and what we received because of our presence in DC.

I am tired of being the negative Nell in my reports. I want to be reporting on what we have done. Part of keeping the membership informed is letting them know what really goes on because there seems to be a lot of gossip on many of the Facebook sites. It is unfortunate because many members just want to know what is going on. I guess people don't think they need to be credible behind the keyboard. I also want to say that I find it very cowardly for a person to name call and post lies and block the person so they cannot see or defend themselves. I really cannot stomach your lies but at least be a man and say it to my face.

I want to take the time to thank our team members who come into work every day to provide services and those who generate revenue so our members receive services. I know that your job is not always easy and you feel frustrated and think things will never get better. Please continue to hang in there. I appreciate your efforts and will continue to fight on your behalf.

For the elders in Unit III, you are a great bunch of people who will get through these bumps in the road and will be stronger because of it. This unit has always been a strong and tight group of people and will stand united. We all have the best interests of the tribe at heart and just need to concentrate on that instead of the little flames being thrown to create chaos.

For the members of the Sault Tribe, I wish you a merry Christmas and happy new year! I will continue to stand strong in 2015 and hope I serve you well. Please contact me at (906) 430-0536 or bsorenson@saulttribe.net or bridgett91@yahoo.com.