

# Notes on board activities, scholarship season



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There have been a few resolutions brought to the board by a couple of directors for at large representation and/or a Unit VI. Unfortunately, we have not been able to collectively have an opportunity to discuss these in a workshop. The timing for these resolutions for one is not the best as we have an election code that states no changes six months prior to an election.

I have very mixed feelings on the at large representation. First, how do we decide how many representatives will be added? Which area will they come from? Will they have to move to the service area when elected?

The current structure of 13 members of the governing body already makes it difficult to agree, compromise or move forward.

Another issue is that, if at large representation is granted, do they only vote for the at large director(s)?

I realize some are upset if that is what happens because they have ties to a particular unit. I can understand that but, at the same time for those pushing for at large representation and want to vote in another unit, what would be the difference of what you have now?

I would have to guess that 90 percent of what we vote on affects only the seven-county service area. In my almost two years of being on the board, I have only had a handful of my constituents contact me about wanting their own representation. I have received emails and calls from people in all units with questions and concerns that I have communicated with.

I feel that I represent the voters in Unit III and the tribe as a whole. If you have an opinion on the issue of at large representation or Unit VI, please reach out to your representatives to discuss the issues. Many times a certain group tells us they want or believe in this or that, but that does not mean the majority share their opinion.

The board has been meeting with the casino COO and CFO in gaming authority workshops twice a month for a few months and just recently added semi-annual reviews to the mornings of those two Wednesdays a month. We meet with a couple of government divisions at a time for reporting and updates which is very beneficial. The Communications Department has been videotaping these for

archives.

At the Feb. 18 meeting in St. Ignace, the board made a motion to meet the other two Wednesdays a month to try and get to the many items we have been backlogged with. The chairman was upset saying this does not fit in his schedule and we have been holding these gaming authority workshops even though he can't make them. There was a motion to then amend to have the chairman try and re-arrange his schedule. I think the board is trying to move things forward and meet more to accomplish things and there will always be conflicts with someone's schedule. As long as a majority of the board can make it, business must go on. I have asked that the board be able to meet to begin preparing a five-year strategic plan. This is essential to plan our direction when our debt is paid off in the next three or four years. We need to incorporate economic development and possibly hiring a consultant.

On our Feb. 19 semi-annual review with the cultural division, we learned that they have the capabilities to Livestream and broadcast language classes or other activities. This is great news to our entire membership. What a better way for those members living away from home to be able to remain culturally active. Look for more information about this on the tribe's webpage or newspaper.

On March 3, I attended our Community Transformation Grant meeting. Our grant will be ending in October but we will be looking at ways to sustain some of the programs such as employee wellness programs, tobacco cessation, smoke free worksites, safe streets, etc. Our Head Start program has been having monthly employee contests and our St. Ignace health center has been having onsite fitness classes coordinated through Mackinac Straits Health Systems for their team members to remain active and less stressed. This grant program has also sponsored past screenings to casino team members and has sponsored a wellness challenge in the late spring/early summer. I hope we can continue to seek grants to help our team members and communities with wellness.

At our March 4 workshop, the Housing Authority presented their weatherization program and possible changes to the program. This program allows help to home owners for work on their roofs, windows, doors, insulation, heating systems, etc. The program will be open for applications in May with up to \$5,000 awarded. For more information on this program please contact the housing division at 495-1450.

At our March 4 meeting, the chairman requested we change our April meetings to accommodate his trip to D.C. I have always supported him going to D.C. on our behalf because he does a phenomenal job educating the legislators, but I will not support rearranging our meeting schedules for one person. We publish our meeting schedule

for the whole year and members make plans to attend meetings as well as staff and board members make plans around that schedule. I will re-iterate that business must go on. I feel that the chairman and Cathy as her role as chairwoman of the National Indian Health Board need to represent our interests in D.C. and they do a great job, so why not allow the other 11 members of the board to continue to meet and conduct business as usual. The more we can all accomplish, the better we are as a governing body. The April meetings will now be April 15 in Kinross and April 29 in Munising.

On March 5, we had our Gaming Authority workshop and asked our COO, Tony Goetz, to give us a back of the house tour of the Sault casino. Some board members have never been in these areas. I think the staff was very surprised to see us coming through the kitchen, offices, hotel and gaming floor. It is helpful to the board members to understand when team members contact them with concerns. I believe the staff also needs to know the board is serious about reform and making our casinos top notch gaming facilities and a place team members can take pride in.

We had good news involving moving forward with the Lansing project until the State of Michigan was recently granted a stay for the Supreme Court to hear the case. When the project was initiated, the tribe knew it would be a long road possibly taking years to move forward with our legal battles to open a down state casino, so as disappointing as this is, it was expected. The gaming expansion committee continues to meet twice a month for discussions with our developers and legal team.

I would like to apologize for the chairman publishing the 2012

voter registration list on social media. I have heard concerns from members regarding they did not appreciate their information going public. I have concerns especially for victims of violence that do not need their perpetrators gaining any of this information. I was always under the impression that, when we run in the election, this information was for our campaign only. I feel that if members want to vote, they will call enrollment and register. The idea that there has to be bribes of offering a chance to win \$1,000 prior to an election is strictly campaigning. During a discussion at the January meeting in Newberry, the chairman was upset with a resolution that would have made it so board members could not have any other employment other than their board seat. He said that members deserve the right to choose who they want representing them and why should we interfere with that. What is the difference if he is campaigning against incumbents? I was not on the board during his last term but know that he could not work with them either. He is not working with this board, hence the reason to register new voters to hope he can further create his dictatorship. I wonder is it really 12 members of two different boards or is it him?

I can tell you from experience that what you think this position entails is very different when you are actually here and then you realize "wow, what did I get myself into?" You can campaign on certain things and get elected and realize things are not as easy to accomplish as you thought. You gain more access to information on the inside and have to work with 11 other people to move things forward. The proposed constitution is one of those things. It is not black and white. Many of the vocal members tell

the board they support the new constitution but never really tell you why. I think if you hear someone tell you every day we need a new constitution then you think hey we need a new constitution but they can't tell you specifically why. It has been promulgated that the board does not want to give up any power. Would you rather 12 people in control or one? The 12 board members cannot even try to schedule more workshop times or stick to the meeting schedule because of the chairman's schedule. Now tell me who wants control? If the board does not concede, he threatens to not go to D.C. At one time he threatened the Lansing project if the board did not support constitutional reform.

Last year the board named scholarships in honor of certain people in each unit. Keith and I named the Unit III scholarship in honor of Donald "Duck" Andress of Mackinac Island. 'Tis the season to be seeking scholarships for those soon to be graduating seniors. Watch the tribal newspaper, website or contact the Education Department at (906) 635-6050 for further scholarship opportunities. I will again be giving away a \$1,000 scholarship to a senior in Unit III. If interested, please send me an email and I will send you an application, the deadline for submission will be May 15. The one thing in life that can never be taken away from you is your education.

Thank you to our dedicated team members for hanging in there during these sometimes difficult times. I appreciate your efforts and continue to push for a better future.

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at my office 643-2123, cell 430-0536 or email bsorenson@saulttribe.ne or bridgett91@yahoo.com.