

Playing games creates unnecessary roadblocks



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It is no surprise that the tribe has been struggling with budget forecasts for 2014 with the constant threat of sequestration. Last year sequestration was 5.1 percent and as I write this report we still have no guarantee of what this year will be. The board was hesitant to pass the 2014 budgets until we had a better idea from the federal government so we passed a continuing resolution on Aug. 20 in Marquette to continue spending in line with last year's budget. The chairman had set up a workshop to discuss the constitution for Sept. 5 from 10 to 6 p.m. and budgets for Sept. 6. I sent an email to him and the board asking to please consider meeting on the budgets instead as I felt that we needed to be proactive instead of reactive prior to the continuing resolution expiring. Some of the other board members agreed via emails and, when we came together on Sept. 5, a few of us brought it up that we really needed to meet on budgets. The chairman was less than happy and we said we would like to have opinions from each board member. Two of the board members were not able to attend on Friday, with one being the treasurer, so it made sense to discuss the budget while he was in attendance. The chairman picked up his phone and made a call to cancel his trip to D.C. and said he was getting off all his appointed committees because we wanted to discuss the budgets. He claimed the Budget Department, which is under his direct

of us had already asked Budgets if they were ready and they said they were. Needless to say, it was a battle and he agreed that we would go to lunch and meet with Budgets at 1 p.m. Since we had no clear number of sequestration and threats of 14 percent cuts, some of us thought we should at least prepare for that. There was lengthy discussion on options, and we agreed to have the divisions prepare budgets for 5 percent, 10 percent and 14 percent cuts. It is a tremendous amount of work for them, but we really need a picture of the effect on our programs, services and jobs for these potential cuts. We wanted the numbers and a narrative with plans. So, as I write this on Oct. 5, I have yet to see a budget or narrative on any area except a total dollar amount. Please tell me why the board is not getting the information. It sounds very ridiculous, but unless the board stands up and demands that we need to be kept informed, we will be making huge mistakes. I am so frustrated — there is not a board member who wants to see any cuts to services, programs or jobs. We do need to hear and see from the divisions their plan in case we suffer with those cuts so, as the governing body of Sault Tribe, we can do what is best for the tribe. There have been cost saving options such as furloughs, no health profession cost of living allowances, the over the max continues to be thrown around. One of the problems I have with the team members who are being paid over the maximum that their position is supposed to allow is that many of these people are over the max because they received yearly raises approved by the board. We have taken many things from our front line workers over the years and now we are going to slap you again and take your board approved raises from you? Somebody better come up with a better plan. We were again supposed to meet on the budgets on Sept. 16 and 17 and the chairman was in D.C. and said the workshops were canceled because the staff was not ready to present them. The divisions had to turn

them in on Friday, Sept. 12, at 8 a.m. so that the executive team could review them on Friday and Monday and meet with the board on Tuesday and Wednesday. We have not seen any of the cuts or narratives. We were left with the Sept. 30 workshop and special meeting to deal with the continuing resolution. Another waste of time as the Budget Department sat with a prepared power point that we never saw. So at 5 p.m. during the special meeting, the continuing resolution until Oct. 31 was passed with Director Massaway and I voting "no." I can only speak on my behalf that my reason for voting "no" was because we did not see the division cuts or narratives. If we continue to operate on last year's numbers and we are sequestered 5 percent (\$1.8 million), 10 percent (\$3.6 million), or 14 percent (\$5.7 million) or more we will be 30 days of spending and have to make bigger cuts later. The chairman believes we may only be sequestered 2 percent (\$739,000). The problem is, God forbid if we meet while the chairman spent 10 days in D.C. trying to convince the feds that tribes should not be sequestered. We needed him to be there, but why is the board not allowed to meet without him? Since the board chose to meet on Sept. 5 on the budgets, we received a memo on Sept. 6, with notice of five special meetings on Sept. 20, 21, 23, 25 and 28. We were to meet from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on the constitution review and vote on constitutional amendments. Attached read the following: a second action item is the deduction of pro-rated amount of board pay for missing duly called meetings of the BOD, Special Meetings, Gaming Authority, Gaming Commission, Government Financial Reviews, Enterprise Financial Reviews, and duly called Budget Hearings (called as special meetings of either the Tribal Board of Directors or Gaming Authority). The deduct amount shall be \$500 per non-excused absences. Excused shall be limited to those where advanced notice is provided to all board members and only for immediate family medical (with

doctor's verification), bereavement, jury duty or court subpoena or summons or official tribal business. Personally, I do not have an attendance problem, this is my full-time job. On Sept. 13, we received an updated memo with Sept. 23 and 25 no longer on there with no explanation. So came Sept. 20 at 10:11am or so the meeting was called to order. The chairman was not present and nobody in the room had heard from him. Director McKelvie motioned to adjourn the meeting and I seconded it and all agreed but one. First of all, the chairman called the meeting, was MIA, and we had no action items. A few minutes after we adjourned the chairman texted the executive secretary and said he was 20 minutes out in a torrential rain storm. On our way out at 11:10 a.m. the chairman arrived. Prior to leaving, there were board members who said they could not make the Saturday meeting, me being one of them as I was going to an elder's funeral in my unit. I watched the Livestream prior to the funeral and after and all it was, was a big fight with a decision to put the original draft constitution on the board agenda to vote on and talk about amendments. There was supposed to be another constitution review day on Saturday, Sept. 28, that was canceled by the chairman via an email on Sept. 25. About half of the board did meet on Friday, Sept. 27 on the casino team member surveys and reviewed Hessel and Christmas surveys. I would like to see us meet one day a week until we get through them with an action plan. On Oct. 1, we had our workshop and meeting in the Sault. Our agenda, as always, reads, call to order, invocation (prayer, smudging, presentation of grandfathers), roll call, etc. We have only smudged during the first few meetings since I have been elected and were then presented the seven grandfathers. This meeting the prayer was skipped over before I mentioned it. Many times we do not do a Native prayer. I am in fear that we are only a sovereign nation as long as we have our language and culture and that the U.S. government would love to take that away from us. Our elder Unit V director did read the Native 10 commandments, which was very fitting. Along came the vote on the proposed original draft of the constitution. I raised my hand to say that one year ago, when we discussed this document, that we were told by the chairman that we were denying our people the right to vote by not sending this document to the BIA for a secretarial election. I said I would not agree with sending this document out for a vote because I believe it is detrimental to the tribe. So, I then asked why a year later we were being told by the chairman that he could not support it in its original form.

What changed? What would have happened if we would have sent it out and the people approved it? They would have had the right to vote on it but upon approval, the tribe would have been devastated. A tribal member in the audience spoke and said he believed the proposed constitution is a form of white government. I have to say he made a good point. I understand that our ancestors chose leaders to travel and speak on behalf of them and their interests. Where do we find that in the three branches of the U.S. government? Why would a tribe want to emulate the government of the white man? Could this be another way of losing our sovereignty? We need to function as a TRIBE. I have never seen such a big divide with our people, members leaving the tribe, bullying, etc. To sum things up, I am sick of the game play. We get threatened if we do not want to change a meeting so the chairman can go out of town or he will resign from his committee appointments. Can you imagine if we shut down the Midjims or casino because the manager could not be there? We cannot meet with Budgets when we want, our new government financial calendar states that it is an administrative meeting only and there will be no questions or answers allowed. I would like to thank all of the division directors and executive team for all the hard work preparing your budgets with the least amount of impact to the tribe. You are the experts in your area and you know where the greatest areas of impact on the membership lie. The St. Ignace board of directors meeting has been changed to Oct. 22 at the casino event center. On Oct. 19 at noon there will be a dedication at the Wequayoc Cemetery with a plaque purchased by Director Hollowell. Anyone with children who need help with sports, driver's training, band equipment, etc., please apply for a youth sponsorship by calling the Big Bear at (906) 635-RINK for more information. So many elders have passed on in my unit, please take time for family and friends and remember what is truly important in life. Life is too short for negativity! For concerns please call me at 430-0536, my office at 643-2123, email me bsorenson@saulttribe.net or bridgett91@yahoo.com.