

Causley discusses local, national tribal issues



LANA CAUSLEY, DIRECTOR, UNIT II

COST SAVINGS

In my last unit report, I explained that the 2013 schedule B budget was approved on the condition that we would meet directly and identify cost savings in the amount of \$3.5 million. The following meetings set up, started with the administration along with all program directors and managers meeting and making recommendations or providing options in each line item within their department’s budget. As explained to the board it was made clear that all recommendations and options would not affect direct services or employment positions.

In the second step, the chairman and the board met with each division director or program manager and discussed how the savings would effect the department. After days of this process we modified our 2013 governmental budget without reducing funding for direct services or eliminating any employment positions.

I was a little concerned after seeing the savings in departments’ budgets that could be cut without affecting services. In the Health budget, there was an estimated savings of over \$3 million identified with no plan to use the funding amount. I understand that all budgets have some padding, but vacant positions, travel, and amounts requested when the funding had no intention on being utilized is an extremely cumbersome way to project a budget, because after identifying savings it looks as though we cut and that is not the case. We only reduced amounts recommended by the managers of the programs. As a leader attempting to balance a budget and identify funding needed for services, it’s hard when some additional funding is requested when there is no intention to use it. Especially when other departments, such as our Cultural Department, is operating at bare bones and has identified in detail additional money for program needs.

I will be requesting that we steer toward unit based budgets, which means we will have the real numbers of members served based on the amounts requested. For example, if a program asked for \$120,000, the amounts would be broken down on how much of this goes to administration and how much goes to direct service. With our budget constraints, it’s going to take a measure like this to keep our most utilized services available. We need to change the way we project budgets and I will continue to request this.

NATIONAL ISSUES

This past month I attended tribal rights, sovereignty and economic development conferences in Las Vegas, Nev. The conference was one of the most informative that I have attended (although I didn’t like Nevada). The main focus of the conference was to review the current and significant issues facing Indian country and our sovereignty.

One main item discussed was the class action lawsuit our tribe is a party to and has retained council to assist. Lloyd Miller from Sonosky, Chambers reviewed and educated tribes with the Rajah case. This is the lawsuit against the federal government for undercalculating the totals paid out to tribes for the contract support costs we incur as self-governance tribes. The federal government has responsibility to pay these costs and continuously over the years we have not been paid the full amount. Each year, Congress has had money in the budget appropriated to fund the self-governance tribes’ contract support costs, but used the money elsewhere.

The statute states that the government will pay up front, in full, our contract support costs, which includes departments such as Law Enforcement and Indian Health Services. We are a party to this lawsuit and I have written about it in past reports. This lawsuit could be so beneficial to our tribe and others — billions of dollars are owed and to make the federal government accountable will secure money needed for the future. I’m very relieved we are part of this lawsuit and will update as we move forward.

Other updates discussed on the national level were the sequestration and the Bush era tax cut. Tribes cannot sustain the needs we have now and the funding cuts discussed would hurt our programs even more. Our leadership needs to be proactive about the trust responsibility that is owed to us and also be mindful that, if the sequestration happens, we need to be fully prepared. Our administration is aware of this and our leadership should be doing its part to demand protection of our programs.

Two other major issues left unresolved is the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act and tribal economic development bonds. Both items will be at the forefront after the congressional recess. Our department has been very active in being a voice for this program and it’s one that is very successful within our tribe. We spoke about IRS rules, development bonds, tribal, state tax sharing bonds, union in the workplace, self-governance rules, energy activities, NLRB activities and sovereign activities that will enhance our tribal families.

ONLINE GAMING

One last item I will highlight and demands our full attention and action plan is “online gaming.” Online gaming is a sovereign right that we hold as a federally recognized tribe. The market is untapped at this point and it is estimated hundreds of millions of dollars could be made. This part of the conference was the most important to me as we heard about other tribes’ plans to move forward now before the market becomes satu-



Kids show off their mandalas at this year’s Hessel Fall Feast.

rated. Director Pine has taken the lead in keeping this in the forefront with our gaming executives and all information will be passed on to assist with our plans moving forward. We need to act now before states make certain online gaming activities legal. It’s an untapped revenue source that our tribe needs to be the experts on.

I highlighted the issues and activities here and all information is provided to the entire board for review. I will be requesting action plans from the departments on other items with information being provided to them as well.

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

As I write this report, and have stated in the past, it’s always exciting to come back home bringing thoughts, plans and updates to our tribe but the difficult part is keeping focus and looking and moving toward the real future. We still have positions that have no directors, such as human resources, executive director and a CEO. The chairman has a responsibility that is huge, working toward all goals from the board and the day-to-day oversight of all governmental staff that it leaves our businesses open to being on the back burner. This is not a criticism; it’s a fact. There is so much we can be doing and again, it’s difficult to keep everyone focused on the real future we need as a tribal nation. We are here putting out fires, rearranging offices, robbing Peter to pay Paul, whining who needs more authority, bringing up old wounds and all while the real issues within our tribal nation are ignored or left to a later date. In all, I’m glad I attended and will educate and update my fellow board members on the needs that had been discussed and can work together toward.

LANSING CASINO PROJECT

I would like to inform you of some board actions. After much discussion, I introduced a resolution to make board of directors’ travel open to the membership upon request. We speak about leadership and our role within the tribe; it’s imperative you feel that the information can be provided when asked.

We passed a resolution to purchase land for the Lansing casino. It’s an ongoing plan, and I’m still skeptical, but firming up the plans is at the forefront, and the plan is tighter than it once was. The land transaction completed included a parcel adjacent to the Lansing center at Michigan Avenue and Larch. The tribe acquired the

land for \$280,000 plus \$9,000 in closing costs. The purchase price includes the full market value of the land. We have an agreement with the city to close on the other two parcels over time, assuming all approvals for the project are secured.

LONG-TERM 2 PERCENT

In our unit, we have requested discussions on long-term 2 percent agreements with no action being taken at this point. I will keep it on the agenda until it is resolved. At the beginning of this report, I wrote about padding budgets and real plans to secure services in our unit. Director Hollowell and I have met with both the health director and chairman on plans to regain past clinical health services offered in our unit, namely, DeTour and Drummond. These were cut in 2008. We are still waiting for information and we will keep the issue on the agenda.

FIGHTING DRUG ABUSE

In my last few reports, I wrote about our immediate need to address the drug issues in our communities. This past month, I and Director Sorenson, along with the court and a few other departments, met to discuss and create a “tribal action plan” to address the needs and move the entire tribe toward the needs and goals to assist our communities. First I want to thank the departments that attended and I’m grateful for the commitment, but the meeting was not well attended and we discussed the gaps we have to overcome and the participants’ concern moving forward at this point. This plan will not work without full participation and commitment by our entire tribe. In attendance was Center for Court Innovation’s Senior Associate Sarah Reckless. The session was held to discuss the statistics we face for evaluation and implementation (we didn’t have them), create an advisory board (all departments were not there to be represented) and create a tribal action plan for our individual communities (because all units have individual needs, for example, Unit II has rural access to services issues) and a presentation on community assessment projects that have worked for other tribes.

We discussed community assessment surveys and what will happen once developed to make sure it’s not just to collect data, talk and do nothing with it. Other items we discussed were to identify and prioritize challenges, engage community members, build support for

future projects and collect baseline data.

In closing on this update, the above details the scale of participation we need. I suggested at the meeting that the board members go to their elder groups and youth groups to identify the needs per unit — this will put the issue on the forefront and create awareness from the board to their individual units. There is so much work to be done on this cause and I had immediately contacted the chairman in order to ensure his support and assistance on making sure all departments had a seat at the table and the need for this plan to NOT fizzle out and become a committee with no real plan. Our next meeting is on Nov. 6 and I expect a better attendance. I will be discussing with the entire board the thoughts on each session and with the meetings and calls I have from our respective unit. I will be at the table to ensure our community’s role, involvement and needs. Again, thank you to all departments that did attend.

CONSTITUTION UPDATE

One last update is the implementation of the review group to look over our draft constitution. As you all know when we started this, years ago, I have always been in support of the process. When we first started the project, the board was directed not to get involved in the draft and this was detailed in the “constitutional convention plan document.” You can review a copy by contacting Joanne Carr.

Moving forward, I agree that it should be reviewed again but the original committee that volunteered countless hours needs to be part of the process, many items were viewed problematic and to be factual, we didn’t have the funding to implement certain changes. I have continuously requested that we do amendments and plan financially for each so we acquire the much needed changes to our current constitution (we did it with board members prohibited from working for tribe when elected in office) so we can do it for all items we need immediate correction on.

Please read the draft in the last tribal paper and call me with your comment. We have discussed this at many unit, elder, youth and coffee sit down meetings, so I’m very vested in the process. I represent Unit II and some items within the current draft have been brought to my attention with no real avenue for us to make changes at this point. I’m looking forward to seeing the plan moving forward to have input and please read the document and be vocal about your comments and concerns to all your reps, committee members and elder groups.

HESSEL FALL FEAST

Lastly, in Hessel we held our annual fall feast and pipe gathering this past weekend. The turn out was so amazing — community, family, youth and elders came and visited for the day. Chi miigwech to our community drum, Muukwa Giizek, I’m so proud and thankful for you guys, we all are. Thank you to our committee and visitors who helped keep our culture thriving and keeps us going.

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