

Dealing with nonsense while trying to do job



**BRIDGETT SORENSON,
DIRECTOR, UNIT III**

I would like to apologize to the parents who have children attending the JKL School. It is unfortunate that someone would make public statements saying the school would be closing if the board did not renew the lease. This was so far-fetched. There were going to be changes to the lease. Why would the board close the school when we have purchased property to expand the school in the future?

The chairman sent out an email on March 19 claiming he was resigning from the JKL Fiduciary Committee because meetings were being scheduled that didn't fit his schedule. The tribe doesn't stop for one person.

The next bit of hype was that there have never been any appointments to the committee besides Director Abramson. Since I have been on the board it has always been Unit I board members only who served on the JKL. There were no appointments following the last two elections; it was just automatic that the Unit I board members were on the committee. It was said that Director McLeod was not even appointed as the chair of the committee. I remember Aaron suggesting Jen become the chair of the JKL because of her background in education when we got elected, but that is when he liked her.

At the April 7 meeting, there was a resolution titled *Membership on the JKL Fiduciary Committee*. This stated that the chairperson and all Unit I board members would serve on the committee unless they declined in writing. It also stated that all other unit directors could serve as long as they requested an appointment in writing. Director Abramson requested to strike the other units from serving on the committee. This resolution passed with the amendment restricting only Unit I representatives. I voted "no" for two reasons. First, I am not going to appoint the chairman who resigns because meetings do not revolve around his schedule and, second, if the board is ultimately responsible for the funds, then all units should be eligible. We also voted on whether to accept the chairman's resignation from JKL. Myself and two other directors voted "yes" so it failed.

The Cultural Committee sponsored a resolution to rename the committee and amend its bylaws. The committee will now be named the Anishinabe Bimaadiziwin Waawiyeyaa Circle. The group has been working very hard for the past year or so to create their mission, vision statement and guiding principles, which focus on the seven grandfather teachings. The chairman was appointed to this committee when it was first organized and resigned because he didn't like the direction it was going and he bashed this committee since that time. Lo and behold he wanted to be appointed again since this resolution was on for a vote. I was the only one who voted 'no.' I cannot for the life of me understand why you would appoint someone to a committee focused on the seven grandfathers when the person does not live by them. Just two examples are truth and respect. There was just recent lies spread about JKL closing and there

hasn't been any respect for the women on the board, elders in our communities nor our team members. I sit and wonder if I am the crazy one since I was the only one to vote 'no.'

Another contentious resolution that was voted on was the one to rescind resolution 2013-188 and establish a wage freeze for team members whose wages exceed the range established for their pay grade. This has been a political football since the 2012 election (over the max). We were told there was a list of team members who were being over paid to the tune of over a million dollars. Some of these team members have been there for 10, 20, 30 years. The list has also changed since 2012 and the potential savings currently would be about \$400,000. The board voted in 2013 to have administration check into those team member's employment files who were considered being paid over the max. They were to look for wage adjustments that were not documented and raises that did not meet the tribe's raise percentages of that year and report back to the board with the findings.

It has been about one-and-a-half years since voting on that resolution and that action was going to be taken. I have a few issues with it because the wage study was done a few years ago and these people may no longer be over the maximum for the position, the list has changed and may have been manipulated, and I do not believe there would be so many people that received improper wage increases, which I believe was around 100. I realize we have not been able to give raises to our team members in far too long but pitting these groups of team members against each other is not the answer. It was said that the savings from cutting the "over the max" team members could be used for pay compression and raises. The

resolution passed to rescind 2013-188 because the chairman was going to reduce the team members' wages in May. There are people out there thinking board members were protecting their family by voting to stop the wages from being cut. None of my family members were on the list and do not hold "big" positions in the tribe.

The board had asked the executive director to develop an economic development position so that was voted on at the April 7 meeting also. I had a hard time deciding how to vote because the position will cost the tribe over a \$120,000 with wages, fringe, etc. We continue to make the government side larger when casino revenues are decreasing but we do need to diversify and look at other business opportunities so in the end I voted for it. I hope we get a highly qualified individual with a business background.

At the March 24 meeting there were many resolutions about feasibility studies to build Midjims in other units and to re-locate the St. Ignace Midjim. The staff member who worked on funding for the study drove to Manistique to present and was not even given the time to present. The study for the St. Ignace Midjim was going to be covered by the MEDC. I agree with researching the possibilities for other stores in other units, but why would you not support feasibility in St. Ignace since it already exists and needs over \$600,000 in work currently and it costs the tribe nothing?

At one of our meetings last month, Director Causley asked that the board vote to include board concerns on board meeting agendas. There was not enough support for this. Since I have been on the board we have always had board concerns and many times the meetings remained open so if things needed to be taken care of the

board could vote on it. Lately, the meetings are adjourned before we can discuss them and the chair even moved them to Wednesdays following our meetings, when we were meeting on Wednesdays. I actually had requested that the tribe donate or give a reduced rate to the St. Ignace Schools for taking a group of students to Detroit to catch a plane to Europe. The board voted to adjourn the meeting before I got to even bring my issue forward. Luckily there was consensus to support this. As a board member it is our job to bring our concerns and the concerns of our people forward. We should be able to ask them while membership is present so they can hear the questions and answers.

The chairman has also been directing staff to not show up for certain meetings because he doesn't agree with the meeting. He has directed staff to not write resolutions when the board has asked staff to write them. As you can see, these are more games with his authority. He doesn't have to agree with the board but he does have to comply with board decisions.

We currently have seven vacancies on the election committee. If you are interested, please contact Joanne Carr or Tara McKelvie at 635-6050 for more information.

I would like to thank Shirley Goudreau, her family and the many volunteers and agencies that made the Family Fun Day another great success.

It is that time of year again when students will be preparing for graduation. I will be distributing my yearly \$1,000 scholarship to a student in Unit III. Please email me for an application at bsorenson@saulttribe.net. The deadline to apply is May 15.

Any issues or concerns, please contact me at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, bridgett91@yahoo.com or (906) 430-0536.