

Should election code violations be grounds for removal?



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On May 12, Darcy, Denise, Cathy, Jennifer, Aaron and I were in Mt. Pleasant for the state-tribal summit with the governor. The chairpersons from each tribe were allowed to ask questions of Governor Snyder. Many tribes had concerns with consultation with the sale of lands, fracking, invasive species, the wolf hunt and compact negotiations. I did not get a sense that the governor's office truly realizes the impact of tribes in the state of Michigan.

On May 14, there was a special meeting called by the chairperson to establish a removal hearing on a board member.

There were two other resolutions put on the agenda that were not necessary but used as an excuse to call a meeting. We had discussed these two resolutions before we noticed a reporter from the Soo Evening News present. In my two years on the board, never has a reporter been present during our meetings. There was a motion made for the reporter to leave and the majority supported it. The reporter was obviously called by the chairperson and our newspaper was not present. I am in total support for transparency and open meetings with our membership, but do not think we need to air our business to the world through outside newspapers or Livestream. Bay Mills only allows their members to attend their meetings. I support Livestream with access by Sault Tribe members only.

With the election in full swing there has been many election complaints filed with the Election Committee. To me, that says that people are human and may make mistakes such as sending out flyers without statements of "paid for or endorsed by," placing signs on tribal property but not in a resident's yard, the use of intellectual property, etc. Some of it gets petty. In the past,

if the election committee found someone guilty of a violation they would be fined. The current code was changed in August of 2004 to make an election code violation a removable offense. I realize it is in the code, but do most people believe it should be grounds for removal?

The process for the removal is for a petition to be filed containing a minimum number of signatures which is either 100 or 10 percent of total votes from the last election in that unit. Once the signatures have been gathered with a specific violation written on the petition, they need to be turned into the board's administrative secretary during a duly called meeting. She then submits them to the Enrollment Department to verify signatures. Once this process has taken place and the required signatures are validated, then the board of directors establish a hearing board which consists of four outside attorneys (\$\$\$) to determine if a director will be removed from office.

On May 16, the board of directors via U.S. mail received a letter from the election committee stating that there were alleged election code violations reported and actions taken that made an investigation by the Election Committee tainted. The Election Committee had then dismissed these allegations. Without getting into detail, I believe the actions of all parties need to be investigated. The board voted to add the item to the meeting agenda in Naubinway on May 20 but was told it would be better if the Gaming Commission (10 of the board members and chairperson) were to discuss the matter. The board then voted to hold a commission meeting on May 27.

While the board was present on the 21st for semi-annual reviews and a gaming authority workshop, we discussed calling a special gaming commission meeting to deal with the situation. The code states that a majority of the commission can call a special meeting with 48 hour notice. There were seven board members present and we called the meeting for Friday, May 23. The chairperson was not in the workshop when we discussed this and was furious when he was told we had called a meeting. He said we did not have consensus of the board. He was upset that we did not contact all members for input. The board was meeting and all members of the board knew of

the workshop so I do not believe those missing need to be polled. The chairperson said he would be going to D.C. and that he told us that. He mentioned the night prior that he had been invited to a roundtable with the president but was not sure he had the funds. He proceeded to D.C. and the commissioners met. It was a waste of my time as we were told any action needed to be taken by the board of directors. One of the directors actually left the meeting prior to a vote.

The chairperson has called a special meeting for May 27 to change the June 3 meeting in St. Ignace to June 2. There was an email sent out by the chair on May 19, asking for support to change the meeting and asked if there was support for it, if not he would not introduce the idea at the meeting on the 20. He went around polling the directors during a break at the meeting for support to change the meeting date. He needed nine votes to add it to the agenda since it had not been noticed five days in advance of the agenda. He had eight votes. I did not support changing the date and will continue to not support it unless a majority of the board is out of town on business. We vote on the yearly meeting schedule at the last meeting in December so members, staff and directors can all make plans to attend and schedule other events around those dates. The chairperson says he doesn't miss meetings and the members expect him to be there. He will not go to D.C. on business trips if we do not accommodate his schedule. We have a vice chair to conduct the meeting and business must go on. What do you think should happen?

Another issue is we were told that the chairperson had spent his \$10,000 travel budget during the first quarter. He had originally asked for \$50,000. I would like to see what those expenses have been to date and how he plans on traveling for the rest of the year. He would normally attend the NCAI (National Congress of American Indians) conferences. There is one scheduled in June in Alaska and he had been asked to go. He told them he did not have the money to travel but the JKL Fiduciary Committee had money in their budget for him to go and he then proceeded to say we would not accommodate his schedule. I think the reason is he does not fly and would need several days to drive.

Our staff, led by our assistant executive director, Angeline has worked very hard on submitting a last minute grant for suicide prevention with a value of over \$3 million.

During the May 20 meeting, I had introduced a resolution to forbid any individual board member or chairperson to conduct their own individual survey and publish the results in the tribal paper or by using any other tribal resource. These surveys have been conducted and published in 2006 and 2014 during the campaign season. This, to me, is campaigning and using valuable space in our tribal paper. A full ad in the tribal paper is about \$800 and two pages were recently used for survey results and not paid for. The board, as a unit, should conduct surveys as official tribal business and apply the proper methodology. I agree it is appropriate to survey the membership from time to time, but the questions need to be written in a way not to manipulate the outcome. The board voted to table my resolution so we will see what happens.

On the same meeting agenda was a resolution to amend limited delegation of authority to the chairperson. After the 2012 election a special meeting was called in July to give the chairperson limited authority to conduct the day to day business of the tribe. The vote was unanimous to support the delegation. The board was willing to work with the chairperson and give him that authority, which was subject to the board to review and approve, modify or rescind any such action. There are many reasons to amend the authority such as the constitutional amendment that was passed in 2010 to separate the CEO and chairperson of the tribe. The members, in my opinion, no longer wanted one person in charge of the tribe, but rather 13. The various other reasons for me would be the recent action of the chairperson such as lowering the hunting license fee from \$15 to \$5 with a loss of approximately \$25,000, adding items to the meeting agendas without following code first and interfering in casino interviews. The latest is in regards to the recent letter to the board from the election committee.

When the meeting agenda was sent out, the chairperson started rallying his people to be ready to

gather petition signatures because the board was stripping him of his authority. He claims he knows what authority the members want him to have and how many people voted for him. The fact is, when people voted for him he did not have this authority. The authority was given to him after the election in July 2012. The board made a motion to send the resolution to a workshop. Any attempt of the board to simply even ask to review actions is met with victimization. I am not here to do what is best for someone, but rather what is best for the Sault Tribe. While the board was planning a date to discuss the resolution, the chairperson says he does not need to be present because he doesn't support it and will referendum it. Now who does not work with who?

On May 24, I attended the Native American Festival at the Museum of Ojibwe Culture grounds. There was a powwow with three drums, dancers, crafters, demonstrations, a food vendor and a feast. This has become an annual event on Memorial Day weekend. Shirley Sorrels is the museum manager and does a great job planning this event and keeping our culture alive. The museum will be working to replace the fragile long house within the year which will allow for more teachings and talking circles. There were many great people that made this event a success and I would really like to mention you all but would be afraid to forget someone. You know who you are and I appreciate all you did!

On May 25, Brother John gave a Catholic/Anishnaabe service on the museum grounds. The Grandmother Moon singers and Brother Jim Boynton played and sang. This was a celebration of Father Marquette who is buried there. The mass was a reflection of what is really important in life and how fragile life can be.

With the end of the election season in sight, I hope we can concentrate on taking action on the 2015 budget short fall, establishing a five-year strategic plan, receive a plan for generating casino revenues and moving forward on our downstate casino projects.

Please feel free to contact me with questions or concerns at bsorenson@saulttribe.net, Bridgett91@yahoo.com, 430-0536 or office 643-2123.