

# Changes to employee insurance coming soon



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Aaniin, Anishnabek, as I sit to write this article, I am uncertain about what I should report. I generally try to find a way to include something of our culture, a brief update on goings-on in the tribe and a positive message of hope that we are moving forward, even if slowly. Today, however, it is

very difficult to do so.

As I mentioned last month, our tribe has received some significant grants. I am confident you will read about them elsewhere in this newspaper. We have wonderful, hard-working staff who are doing their best to make certain our tribe is successful. We can all be very proud. I do not wish to sound ungrateful, however, this windfall of money is in the form of grants and, by their very nature, are temporary. Grants are WONDERFUL, they are basically “free money,” but they all have an end date, whether it is one or five years, they will end. Our tribe will benefit from these grants and it is all good, except that when the grant ends, the service disappears and the good people who worked hard for our tribe under a grant, find themselves unemployed. This is not acceptable.

This past month, we strug-

gled with ANOTHER shortfall in insurance — again — in the millions of dollars! The board of directors had been warned repeatedly by staff that this would happen and we finally got to the point where a decision was going to be made! It was hotly debated among the board members. Insurance staff presented different options. In the end, the choice was to change the benefits of the plan (resulting in less coverage to the employees) or keep the benefits the same and increase the rates to employees. I did not like either of the choices, however, we had to make a decision. Two issues were brought forward that affected my vote. First, we previously identified money that was going to be given to employees in some manner (yet to be determined). Perhaps it would be as a COLA or a bonus. It was unknown at this point. Secondly, an employee survey showed that

our employees wanted to keep their insurance benefits the same, even if it meant an increase in what they had to pay for it. I reluctantly voted “yes” to an increase in cost to employees, believing they were going to receive an increase in their pay somehow, and I was honoring their desire to maintain coverage “as is.” Six board members voted “yes,” and six board members voted “no.” Under our rules, it then goes to the chairperson to break the tie — except he didn’t. He abstained. This created quite a bit of chaos, and his decision to not vote was challenged, and debated among the board. In the end, there was no decision made — the whole matter just “dropped.” Nothing in all of my years serving on boards and committees had prepared me for this, I was virtually speechless. In my early months as a board member, I cast an “abstain” vote and was

chastised by this very chairman as well as several tribal members for “abstaining.” They expected me to be a leader, make an informed decision and VOTE! But now, for some unknown reason, it is OK? This is NOT acceptable.

The insurance matter is not over yet. Perhaps by the date of this publication it will be. But, as I write this article it is not. I do know this, how could we in good conscience raise insurance rates on people who have not had a raise in pay for YEARS?

I know I am repeating myself by saying “WE NEED TO PRIORITIZE!” “WE NEED TO MAKE A PLAN!” One board member can’t do it. One chairman can’t do it. It takes a commitment from the 13 people elected to the governing board of this tribe to decide that we can no longer continue doing things as we always have and expect different results.

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# McLeod: changes to employee insurance coming

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In my opinion, there needs to be a significant shift in how we do business. From the budget process, to the hiring process; from the organizational chart, to the pay scale chart; from service delivery, to all of the other components necessary to serve our people, we need to change.

The world has changed since we opened our first casino, the federal economy has changed (remember sequestration?), the local economy is about to make a HUGE change (a devastatingly HUGE electric rate increase

is looming), but our tribal operation has not changed much.

I am tired of hearing, "This is how we've always done it." Let me ask, "How's that working for you?"

Change can be a scary thing for many people but, for me, the failure to change is much scarier. As I said last month, "I'm not pointing fingers at anyone or trying to assign blame anywhere." I am looking for solutions, and I am asking for your help.

We need to go back to find our future. As a young girl, I

recall tribal meetings that were so well attended, people had to stand. I recall listening to my relatives making phone calls and writing letters to the tribal leaders of that time. Back in the day, people sounded their voice. I believe we need to do that again.

Call, write, email, text, FB post or meet face to face, let your elected leaders know what is important to you. Let them know that things have to change. We have to go back to putting people first! We HAVE to work better, smarter

and more efficient. We have to honor the people who work for us. We have to do a better job of honoring our old ways. We have to focus on protecting our way of life and providing for the welfare and prosperity of our people.

Lately, when I've been trying to get help for our members, I've been told, "There's nothing we (the tribe) can do"... I don't believe that! As a people, there is MUCH we can do.

Our tribal government can be too complex, too big and too unresponsive. Granted, there are

lots of reasons for that. But it doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Let us work together to care for each other. I am working on some grassroots ideas that are not ready for publication yet, but I hope they will take root.

I am changing what I do, and how I do it. Please join me. I'm going "back to our future."

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