

Fending off taxes on tribal funds and services



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In early December, a Sault Tribal delegation was sent to Washington, D.C., to advocate and educate our national Congress. Chairman Payment, Cathy Abramson, Jennifer

McLeod and myself attended many meetings and had conversations detailing our tribal needs and concerns.

In the last edition of the tribal paper, an article on the delegation was printed. I will not rehash the same information, but augment it with some of the activities that I did separate from the main group. I attended the tribal leader discussion on tax and investment reform. This was held in a hearing room of the Senate Dirkson building. Attending this session was important for the tribe. It gives clues on how the federal government understands the relationship between the tribes and themselves.

We have been hearing for years on how certain parts of the federal government want to tax our casinos. We always interject that we are a sovereign nation and, there-

fore, not taxable unless we allow it. This meeting is always a bit dry and often very long but watching who attends and listening for subtle hints has become second nature to myself.

What I ascertained is although many still want to impose taxes and controls on tribal dollars, the current administration has quietly suppressed these actions. The current administration wants the tribes to succeed and prosper. They feel that although some tribes are struggling greatly, most are finding firm footing and are building strong governments and capable economies.

Some of the attendees were, Senator Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), chairman of Indian Affairs; Senator John Brarasso (R-Wyo.), member of Indian Affairs; Steffan A. Cochran, vice chair-

woman of the National Gaming Commission; Congressman Tom Cole (R-4th Okla.), co-chair of the Native American Caucus; six other senators, four other congressmen and Kevin Washburn, assistant secretary of Indian Affairs.

It was quite a line up, most talked on the mounting debt and taxing the American people. We knew by the end of our three days in D.C. that a complete resolution to the coming fiscal cliff crisis was not going to happen by Dec. 31.

One of the other major points we hammered home was that the Special Diabetes Program for Indians program had not been re-approved by Congress and it is one of the best examples of a program that is doing great things for our people. If the funding was

not re-approved, we would lose nurses and doctors along with many other professionals in the field. As a Native people we are much more susceptible to diabetes than the general public. I am proud to say Congress approved it for another year. We did not get the multi-year re-approval we asked for but it is a major win for Indian Country.

These are some examples of the direct benefits we get from sending representatives to D.C. and talking to the federal government on a government-to-government basis.

Thank you again for all the email and phone calls.

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