

Recent constitutional voting at the board level



LANA CAUSLEY, DIRECTOR,
UNIT II

On Oct. 1, 2013, the tribal board of directors voted on sending the original draft constitution out for a vote of the people. The item was placed on the agenda at least five days in advance per our Tribal Code and was placed on the agenda by the tribal chairman for action. After a long and honest discussion by all the board, the motion I made to send the document out failed with only myself and one other director supporting; the chairman voted 'no' as he can vote on constitutional issues.

I will take this opportunity to explain my position and refer to facts (meeting video, e-mails I have sent and resolution 2005-198) because now misleading attacks are being placed about myself for voting for the project to go out to a vote and ironically those that did not support it are being attacked as well, makes no sense and it's quite shameful, I believe it's simple this way as the whole item of constitutional reform has been used as a political weapon and abused to the most obvious degree to mislead members.

I explained last night as you can review on our site, I have always supported sending out the original document. Back in 2005, the tribe took on the project of constitutional reform and formed a TRIBAL MEMBER COMMITTEE to draft a document of amendments with NO INPUT OR INFLUENCE from the board of directors; see resolution 2005-198, "New Constitution Amendment Project, project plan." in this plan the wording states:

"Guiding Principals

"The Project is designed to let the People of the Tribe develop and vote on proposed amendments to the Constitution. The Constitution is a document for all the People and the whole Tribe. The Board of Directors has agreed to takes steps to stay neutral in the Project, to try to keep 'politics' out of the Project, and to allow the People to develop proposed amendments to the Constitution.

"The Project is a serious matter and any changes to the Constitution could last for many years. The current Constitution has been in place for 30 years.

"Approval Process

"Once proposed amendments to the Constitution are developed, the Committee shall forward their recommendations to the Board of Directors. According to the current requirements contained in

the 1975 Constitution, the Board of Directors must ask the BIA to hold a Special Election, called a 'Secretarial Election,' for the voters to make a final decision on any proposed amendments.

"Voters Have the Final Say

"Any decisions reached by the Committee will not be final until approved by the voters of the Tribe in an election. The voters of the Tribe will make the final decision on any proposed amendments to the Constitution."

These paragraphs are verbatim out of the resolution.

I stayed out of this process and was frustrated but adhered to it. We were prohibited from having input so there was no abuse, political influence or board members creating a document that was self serving.

Once the document was completed and presented to the board, the committee, board and some vocal membership did not agree to the changes. It's a truth the document sat dormant for almost six years with no real effort to bring that back. I have voiced at the board level, wrote in unit reports and requested on our agenda discussion many, many times about prioritizing and working on amendments in that six-year period, I have even been part of two good changes to our current Constitution and that is the reason I have always advocated for amendments. We can send out individual items so it does not cause confusion and we can adjust budgets to accommodate those changes based on planning.

Fast forward to 2013, we created another committee, this time WITH BOARD holding pen to paper with changes, we reviewed the document, discussed changes and some leadership advocating to strip many items out that the people of the tribe drafted (none were officially changed due to the fact it was a review). My elders in Unit II committed to this review and will agree it was only a review. It was in the original project plan that the board could not make changes to the draft that the original committee of THE PEOPLE drafted; it was to go out for a approval from the membership as is.

So, finally, on Oct. 2, it comes to a head. I will say here I respect every vote that was made by my fellow board members on this decision, either way mine was mine and I voted 'yes' because it truly is the only document we have that the people of this tribe created. Anything other, in my opinion, would be and is abused in the process. I explained at the meeting that once the document came in the mail to my home, as a tribal member I would not vote for it but as a leader I would support the entire membership making that decision, because remember, this is the only document that THE PEOPLE created and I wanted to PROTECT that and voiced those same words Oct. 2.

The chairman is a different story, although I respect his vote of NOT sending it out, I'm in total confusion. I agree with the other directors that there are items in there that cannot be handled financially at this time but this

constitutional process has been abused so terribly. You can see from the words out of the project plan that we had a process set with the people! Now games are played, you are misled and it's unacceptable. The document that I voted to send out is not perfect but it sure is better than the politicians making the changes and claiming they speak for you. I'd have to think that after all these years the chair advocating for the changes, then voting no to send out is confusing at the very least. NOW moving forward I will continue to advocate for amendments one by one with your input and direction. I won't use the process as a tool to mislead or create changes that represent myself. I was active and on the board when we did the last two amendments, "board members prohibited from working for the tribe" and "separating the CEO from the chair" and it does and CAN WORK for the people.

Okay, I'm done on that subject, please don't believe the lies and misleading information recklessly posted by leadership on the Internet. I stand willing and committed to changes within our governmental structure with proper planning and direction from the people.

The board has been working on balancing our budget for 2014. I'm proud to say we did get to the point of balancing the year, if we stay the course.

We still face the uncertainty of the final sequestration amounts and our administration staff is working diligently to balance and make recommendations per the amounts for savings. They are aware and agree any cuts are with services and employees retained in mind. I'm proud of them and our board for being on top of this and committing to our responsibilities of financial well being.

Can you believe that Indian tribes are even listed as discretionary spending when it comes to the governmental budgets? Oh, my gosh, I don't even want to get started on that. This is a battle that we must keep battling every day for our people.

I have received many calls on the changes with the Affordable Health Care Act. Below is some information; we have also identified staff at each clinic to assist members with questions.

1. If you are an elder and already have Medicare or Medicaid you do not need to make any changes.

2. If you are an enrolled tribal member of a federally recognized tribe you can opt out from any requirement to sign up.

3. For those elders aged 60-64 who have no insurance, they can call for assistance to sign up on the exchange for the marketplace or to see if their income allows them eligibility to sign up for Medicaid expansion.

4. For coverage on the marketplace to sign up for an insurance plan on the exchange, they need their income from last tax year. This will help to determine the subsidies and tax credits and how much per month insurance will cost them.

5. You can go also to the website www.healthcare.gov and click on "Michigan" and review the exchange and plans available. There is assistance prompts on the website as well. Again, we have staff identified to assist so please take advantage of this on your individual circumstances at our clinics.

It's that time of year for ghost feasts, remembering and feeding our ancestors. Please take the time to feast at those in your communities. Hessel community will be hosting a gathering of the pipes and ghost feast on Nov. 2 at the Hessel Tribal Center. Pipes will be lit at sunrise with ceremonies throughout the day and a ghost feast will begin at dusk. Everyone is invited to attend.

We will also be holding a drum gathering and talking circle on Oct. 24 at 6 p.m. All are welcome; please bring a dish to pass if you can. I hope to see you there.

As always, if you would like to meet or contact me: lcasley@saulttribe.net, (906) 484-2954, (906) 322-3818. Baamaapii.

Lana Causley, Unit II board of directors representative.