

Protecting our legacy during financial squeeze



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UNIT I**

During the month of October, our tribal board spent a lot of time going through governmental budgets. As a matter of fact, we are still going through 2014 budgets. During early budget planning, our tribal program staff were asked by a majority of the board to project a variety of budget scenarios which

included decreasing their budgets by 10 percent and 14 percent in preparations for the possibility of sequestration by the federal government.

At our last board meeting, the board approved 2014 budgets at a 2 percent decrease in federal funds and a 5 percent decrease in tribal funding. I did not support this budget resolution simply because there was also a freeze on all cost of living increases. As part of a board-approved, market-based medical compensation plan developed by an external company with expertise in medical staff compensation to recruit and retain health professionals (doctors, dentists and nurses), we agreed in their contracts that they would receive a cost of living pay increase every year. We also agreed to pay for performance initiative. The pay for performance was taken out of the 2014 budget, along with any professional training development that most places provide for their

staff.

Health care is a number one priority for our tribal people. Because we live in rural areas, we are having the same problems as many rural areas across the country in recruiting and retaining professionals in the health care industry. Not to mention there is a nationwide shortage of healthcare professionals at this time. I fear that cutting this cost of living increase will be the straw that breaks the camel's back when it comes to recruiting and retaining our health care professionals.

In order to provide health care services to our people, we need health care professionals. The demand for health services is already greater than we can provide. The more professionals we lose, the lesser services we will be able to provide. Our peoples' waiting time for services will increase and we would not have the direct access to care that our people deserve.

This is especially disheartening to me, as I have worked hard in Washington, D.C., to increase funding for our people so that we may increase the well-deserved access to health care that our people were promised. I hope the rest of our tribal board knows what they are doing when it comes to providing these health care services.

I would like to take this time to apologize to our governmental program staff, who have been asked to do a variety of budget scenarios which has taken huge amounts of time out of their already busy day-to-day business. The budget projections that they have been asked to make are not even being taken into consideration. They will now be asked to go back and project a budget decrease of 5 percent tribal support and 5.2 percent federal support. I'm aware that we have to prepare for the worst, but I believe we need to make sure that we make good sound deci-

sions when doing so.

I don't believe our governmental and casino staff should be managed this way. I am sorry to see this happen to our dedicated, hardworking and loyal employees who have given us their very best. I want you to know that I am proud of you and I do remember what it was like when we first were able to hire many of our own people who were able to work for their own tribe when no one else in town would give them a chance. I was proud of you then and I am proud of you now.

Please keep our tribe in your prayers during our times of giving thanks. We have awesome services because our ancestors made sure that we were taken care of. Let's make sure we continue to provide for those next seven generations.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at cabramson@saulttribe.net or call me at (906) 322-3823. I look forward to hearing from you.