

Sequestration devastating for Indian Country



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UNIT I**

By now you have all heard on the news that sequestration will occur. While this is horrible news for the entire country, it will be devastating for Indian Country.

This will affect the 2013 funding with a 5 percent cut for all of our federal government programs with the exception of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians, which will be subject to a 2 percent decrease in funding. For example, Indian Health Service discretionary lines – IHS services and facilities accounts – will be subject to a cut of \$195 million for services and \$22 million for facilities for fiscal year 2013. The Special Diabetes Program for Indians will result in a cut of \$3 million. This will affect ALL of our program services to our tribal citizens.

We fought hard to stop that from happening, but it is now a reality. As board members who represent our tribal citizens across the country, our work is not done. We must continue to educate our congressmen and senators about their trust responsibility to our tribes. They must honor the treaties that were signed by our ancestors. This funding is not

free. It is already paid for when our ancestors formally agreed to services in exchange for our lands. When new legislators are elected, we have to begin again to teach them and their staff about who we are and the responsibility that they have to us. The funding we now receive is severely inadequate to serve our people. Any cuts to any tribal programs should never occur. Because of the federal government's trust responsibility to us, our funding should be held harmless to such cuts. Obviously, we must develop those government-to-government relationships and improve our lines of communications with tribal, federal and state governments.

Our staff is working hard to make the necessary budget reductions and have been instructed to do everything possible to not cut into direct services to our people.

I have been busy advocating on your behalf in the following areas: On Feb. 4-6, I attended the Centers for Disease Controls (CDC) Tribal Advisory Committee in Atlanta, Ga. This was an extremely important meeting as CDC had approved their tribal consultation policy without the input and approval of tribal leaders. It was important that our advisory committee take a stand on this issue. I will tell you it was an extremely uncomfortable meeting with top administrators of CDC but the end result was that Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the CDC and administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), admitted that he made a mistake and that he would send a "dear tribal leader" letter to all tribes with the draft consultation policy and ask tribes for their input. Mission accomplished!

President Obama signed into

law that all agencies must consult with tribes. All federal agencies must do so. I have been in a position to see just how important this process is. For the first time, the various federal agencies are having open dialogues with tribes and documenting their input, and some are actually putting tribal input into action. Tribes have a long way to go and it's important that we make sure that the federal agencies follow the established policies when it comes to our tribal nations across the country.

I attended the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST) legislative summit in Washington, D.C. This was an extremely important meeting. MAST, which includes tribes from Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, meets annually in D.C. After a series of presentations from various federal agency administrators, congressmen and key Hill staffers, we broke into groups and stormed the hill to bring our issues to the legislators. Directors Bridgett Sorensen, Jennifer McLeod and I teamed up and met with the staff of Congressman Huizenga (R-Mich.), Congressman Upton (R-Mich.), and Congresswoman Bachmann (R-Minn.). I was so happy and very proud to see my fellow board members in action. Director Sorensen and Director McLeod are very well spoken and they learned very quickly how to get their points across. We brought forth issues such as the protection of our environment, sequestration, holding IHS harmless to sequestration, USDA and the Farm Bill, to name a few. It's good to know that we have board members who have the ability to speak with conviction on behalf of our people.

Our entire board met with

Congressman Dan Benishek (R-Mich.). We were able to spend more time with him and discussed the aforementioned issues. I will say that Congressman Benishek is much more open and interested in our issues since I first met him and would like to learn more about our tribe and others. We intend to educate him! We appreciate that he voted to approve VAWA. Congressman Benishek also expressed interest in helping our area achieve our goal of improving our funding discrepancies. I look forward to meeting with him again!

While in D.C., our Midwest Regional Health Board had its inaugural meeting. Our Bemidji Area (Midwest region) was the only region that did not have a regional health board in Indian Country. Our region is the lowest funded with the highest health-care disparities. It has taken over 15 years to establish this health board but with persistence and hard work, we now have one. We believe this board will strengthen our position in the areas of health care. During this initial meeting, the Regional Health Board reconfirmed my seat on the National Indian Health Board and selected Mr. Sam Moose from the Mil Lacs Tribe as the NIHBS alternate.

On Feb. 19-20, a large contingent of board members attended the United Tribes of Michigan (UTM) meeting in Lansing, Mich. All 12 federally recognized tribes in Michigan are members. Highlights of this meeting were 1) The wolf hunt discussion. Our tribes oppose the opening of the wolf hunts and we are taking a strong stand against it. 2) Support for the State of Michigan in joining Arizona and other states in the filing of an amicus brief in support of the

Indian Child Welfare Act in the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl* et al., 12-399. A UTM resolution was approved by all tribes. 3) Discussion regarding the Affordable Health Care Act implementation and the MI DHS Medicaid Exchange — our tribes stood strong that the state has NOT consulted with our tribes as stated by law. It was very clear that the state staff members who work in this area had a lot of catching up to do in this area. There is much work to be done by our state and our tribal health and insurance staff. Fortunately, we have a well-informed staff, probably the most versed in health care reform than any other tribe in Michigan.

We had an excellent membership meeting in Lansing while we were there. Over 100 people attended and the meeting was very organized and respectful. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting everyone and listening to your concerns. I look forward to seeing you again!

I would like to thank all our staff for all the hard work you do on behalf of our tribe. Over the years, there have been many changes and reductions in staffing that have been necessary for us to move forward so that we may continue to provide the important direct services to our people. Because of these changes, many staff members have taken on many other duties as were assigned to them. Please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed and that you are appreciated and valued.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact me at (906) 322-3823, or e-mail: cabramson@saulttribe.net. I look forward to hearing from you!