

Sequestration calls for prioritizing services



**JENNIFER MCLEOD, DIRECTOR,
UNIT I**

Aaniin Anishnaabek,
My second year as an elected leader of the tribe begins with financial issues continuing to dominate our work. Sequestration is here and it looks like 2014 is going to be worse. There are no easy solutions. I continue to insist that any changes made to any of our revenue generating enterprises must make good business sense. In the long run, making cuts to enterprises simply to support government activity will hurt our ability to make money and be self-sufficient. In difficult economic times, the focus should be on generating profits. The more money (profits) our enterprises make, the more money we have for governmental services to our people. However, it appears that I am in the minority in that thinking and tribal enterprise cuts

are supported by a majority of the board of directors.

I am also of the belief that, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” Our health and housing programs are seen as model projects across the United States! The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians has set the bar for others to achieve when it comes to running a tribal health or housing program. In fact, our health program just won an award! That’s how good these programs are. However, a majority of the board of directors voted to change the organization of these **OUTSTANDING** programs and, basically, bring it under the control of an executive who reports directly to the chairman. The reasons presented to support these changes were not sufficient in my opinion. There is not an organization or program anywhere that does not experience difficulties from time to time, and our health and housing programs are no exception. But solving those problems is the responsibility of the program directors, let them do their jobs! Hold program directors responsible, that’s what they have been hired for, and I know they are capable! Look what they have accomplished so far! We have award winning health and housing programs for our tribe, and I fail to understand the belief that changing the leadership of these programs will make them better. I voted against

this for health and abstained for housing (there was not enough information presented to make an informed decision). However, having lost that vote, I will work to ensure that we do no harm to these fine programs and hope that we will somehow make them better (although at this point I do not see how that is possible). I trust that members of the board vote in a manner each believes is in the best interest of the tribe, and we won’t always agree on what that is. That is the basis of the democratic process, right?

Tribal budgets are being adjusted, and sweeping cuts are being made. I still do not support cutting from revenue generating activity or businesses to support government programs that, in my opinion, are too big to begin with. We are taking many millions of dollars from health alone, to support government programs that **STILL HAVE NOT BEEN PRIORITIZED**. I mentioned in a previous unit report that vital programs need to remain intact. In my mind that means services that keep our people in safe homes, provide food to eat and medical care. Beyond that, this board of directors should be prioritizing all other services to determine if they are vital to the welfare of our people. Perhaps other services can be temporarily reduced or suspended until funding is

available or maybe they simply are not worth keeping. Maybe I am wrong, I do not know the answer to this, as we haven’t had that type of conversation at the board level. However, all we have done, it seems, is take more money from profit generating tribal enterprises and implement a variety of cost saving measures among government service programs. Everyone has done a good job, too, finding ways to save, but we are avoiding the inevitable. We have been told that sequestration is here to stay — we need to be planning for that by evaluating our work and realigning our operation to fit. Living beyond our financial means is not an option that I support and makes no logical sense.

The political machine continues to ramp up as elections draw nearer. I don’t care for politics and I dread the focus changing from “what is best for the tribe” into the chaos and mudslinging that seems to accompany elections everywhere. I very much appreciated the policy of the tribal newspaper during the last election that did not allow negative campaign ads. What a refreshing change! I believe it made our last election much more civil. We are Anishnaabe people — we are better than that!

Looking forward, my efforts will be spent on the mandates given in our tribal Constitution: the perpetuation of our way of

life and the welfare and prosperity of our people.

As I write this article, I am on my way to Minnesota for a Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST) meeting and, hopefully, a meeting with the Bureau of Indian Education. Working with other tribes, I will continue to stand strong to defend treaty rights and help make certain that federal and state governments understand the relationships between them and tribes. To help in this effort, I created a slogan that Chairman Payment is turning into buttons for tribal leaders to use in our work in D.C. It states, “It’s a TRUST thing, treaties are NOT discretionary.” The buttons look great and will increase the visibility of our battle to maintain tribal sovereignty and enforce the federal governments legal “treaty bound” trust responsibility to Indian Nations.

I say miigwech to you all, this is the hardest job I’ve ever loved! I hope to see you at the various powwows the tribe will host this summer or perhaps at a downstate event or maybe during office hours. If you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance, please contact me!

Bamapii!

Jen McLeod
(906) 440-9151

jmcleod1@saulttribe.net or
jennifer.mcleod.2012@gmail.com.