

# Tribal members exempt from Obamacare premium!



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UNIT I**

Aaniin Anishnaabek,  
It is Binaakwe-giizis (Falling Leaves Moon). First comes the brilliant blaze of color, and then the leaves will fall. A final flurry of activity before all is still, waiting for the harsh winter winds, freezing cold and cleansing of winter snows. It has been very much that way for me, this month as a Unit I director.

This past month, I met with the children of our tribe – truly they are the brilliant colors that bring us joy. At Rudyard Area Schools, I enjoyed the high school students' recounts of the summer. Colorful stories of adventures and hardships. It is always a surprise to see how much they have grown. Each morning before class, and during lunch time, too, students would flood the classroom to play Rez-opoly, talk about homework, plan craft projects, or simply to visit. I also had the unique opportunity to spend an hour on Wednesdays with elementary students of JKL Bahweting School. They call it "Culture Wednesday," and community people are invited to spend time with the students and share their cultural knowledge. I told an interactive story of the porcupine to kindergarten and first grade students, and went home with a happy heart and the memories of

little voices singing the porcupine song.

Another brilliant highpoint of this month was the 40th anniversary celebration of the National Indian Health Board. I was so impressed by our Unit I Director Cathy Abramson, she serves as the chairperson of this organization and she was perfect at it. Because of her, I was able to sit with the director of Indian Health Services and many other major players in the Indian Health world. It was such a proud moment to realize how well represented our tribe is on the national healthcare level. I met with many of our members and laughed when other tribal people jokingly remarked about "Sault Tribe again?" We can all be very proud! I learned a great deal, and one of the most important pieces of information that I want to share is:

**When the Affordable Health Care Act takes effect, American Indians are exempt from the premium! I asked specifically if it meant ALL members of federally recognized tribes, or only those living on trust land. I was told straightforward that it meant ALL Indians, regardless of where they live within the United States. WOW! This is great news! Our tribal members, who are unable to access IHS services, and have no employer-provided health insurance, will be able to have the federally mandated insurance coverage without paying insurance premiums! Please watch my and Director Abramson's future unit reports for more information, this is exciting news!**

As Anishnaabe people, we know that there is a balance in life. This month also brought issues that at first glance, are not so good. Our tribe is being sued by the State of Michigan. This is not a first, however, it is the first time that the state has also named

individual board members as defendants. Each member of our board of directors is also being sued in their official capacity. It appears that the state does not like the idea that we intend to exert our sovereignty and purchase land as permitted in our Land Claims Settlement with the federal government. It is a complicated suit, but basically, the state believes that the intended land purchase in Lansing violates an article in a gaming agreement between the state and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Our board, and our legal counsel feel otherwise.

The state has sued a second time as well, threatening the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver, again based on their assertion of a violation of a gaming agreement. My father used to tell me to choose my battles carefully — to look closely and never shy away from fighting the "good fight." In my mind, this qualifies. Although it felt strange to see my name on the legal documents, it strengthened my resolve. I take challenges to our sovereignty seriously and will proudly go into this battle. I believe we have every legal right to purchase land as we and the Department of the Interior sees fit. Time will tell if the courts agree.

All battles, however, do not come only from outside of our tribe. As an elected official, I am subject to scrutiny and criticism from our membership. Truth be told, I welcome it. Non-supporters point out my flaws and enable me to become a better person because of it, and for that I am grateful. I had such an opportunity recently. It seems that there are tribal members who feel that I should not cast an abstaining vote during board meetings. For the most part, I agree. However, if I have a personal conflict, I will abstain. I did not foresee that a conflict would arise that would cause me to abstain as a matter of personal

ethics and principle.

Our board was scheduled to discuss and then vote on a new organizational chart. We had planned to discuss this at the workshop. We did not. As a new board member, I COUNT ON THESE DISCUSSIONS! At the workshop, we were given THREE NEW OPTIONS for an org chart (not the one that was sent to us prior to the meeting). We ran out of time and I was being asked to blindly vote with no input, no clear understanding of the differences, advantages, etc., and no explanation of why it was the best way for the tribe. I am an independent woman and I do my own thinking. No offense to anyone, but I think for myself. I believe that our members count on me to do what I believe is "best for the tribe." To ask me to compromise my integrity, give up my thinking to someone else, and to simply "trust me," was an ethics conflict for me, and I would not participate. I abstained. Even though others may have discussed the org chart for years, I was denied the opportunity previously promised (the workshop discussion), and was expected to vote based on a hasty presentation just before the vote. Some may not agree that this was a "conflict," but for me it was.

When I said earlier, that I would vote yes or no, except due to conflict of interest, I NEVER anticipated that I would be put in a position where I felt that my personal ethics were going to one day be compromised. I met the next day with Chairman Payment to make sure that he understood that my decision is not personal, and to make it clear that I am not involved in anyone's politics. I do not blindly follow anyone. Chairman Payment apologized to me and stated that he understood my position.

I could be wrong in my values and others may disagree, but

that's okay. I am a strong woman and I will not cave in when I am standing for what I believe is right.

Further, I explained that if any other board member ends up voting the same as I in any matter, I voted because I thought I was doing what was right — not because of a "political alignment."

At the board meetings, I don't concern myself with what the others do. I concern myself with the issue and facts. I do not intend to offend anyone and I apologize if I have. I am just telling you how I feel and how I operate. I listen to everyone, consider all sides, and then make up my own mind. I will continue to work hard, stand my ground when I believe that I am right and apologize when I see that I am wrong.

Please note that I will no longer have a tribal phone. It makes no sense to me to carry two phones and our tribe does not need the additional expense.

The following contact information is my personal phone and email. I appreciate those of you who have already contacted me, and I encourage others to reach out to me as well. Miigwech to all, and take some time to enjoy binaakwe-giizis.

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