

Taking action: Standing up and speaking out



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(Editor's note: The following is the April unit report of Unit I Director Jennifer McLeod. Her report, though submitted by deadline, was inadvertently and unintentionally left out of the newspaper.)

Aanii, Anishinaabeg, it's time to set the record straight.

In general, I keep my articles focused on positive, thought provoking, and informational words, written to give our people hope and let them know that I am rising above the petty politics and focusing on the future of our tribe.

Although I have often acknowledged that Chairman Payment does a fine job for us in Washington, D.C., given some recent events, I need to dedicate this space to address the words the chairman used against me in last month's tribal newspaper, as well as some of his unacceptable behaviors at home.

Last month, the chairman resorted to name calling, and labeled me a "hater" just because I do not support canceling or changing board meetings to accommodate his schedule. I have made it clear for three years now that I believe that there is not a single one of the 13 of us sitting at the board of directors table who is SO IMPORTANT that the business of the tribe must come to a halt, simply because of someone's scheduling conflict. If the chairperson must be absent, that is why the board has a vice-chairperson!

Also, we publish our meetings a year in advance for the benefit of our membership, not the convenience of the board of directors. We have members who plan ahead to attend, and will make advance arrangements for travel, or take time off from work, but then the board simply changes the date to accommodate the board (or the chairman!)? This is disrespectful to our people.

We should make every effort to keep our workshop and meeting schedule as set.

There are rare circumstances when I believe that meetings should be changed or cancelled, such as dangerous weather conditions (again, not for board convenience, but to keep our tribal citizens, and employees SAFE!) and when it is known in advance that there will not be a quorum of board members present to conduct a meeting. Example — A majority of the board members may be attending a vital national training or conference that was

not scheduled prior to the board calendar being set.

For some board members, it's not a big deal to change a date on short notice, and I support their right to their view. However, the "meeting shuffle" chaos goes beyond simple date change. There was an instance where the chairman changed the location of a board meeting while board members were en route! Lack of cell phone service in the remote area we were meeting in, resulted in board members and tribal members alike showing up at the wrong location! The board eventually found the right place, but there were some very unhappy tribal citizens who did not. Also, let us not forget the time when the chairman bullied the board by threatening to refuse to meet with PRESIDENT OBAMA, unless the board of directors changed a board meeting date! As our elected tribal chairman, I feel that when the president of the greatest super power in the world requests a meeting with you, you don't play politics, you GO! These tactics are not traits that I look for and respect in a leader. Public name-calling, tantrums and coercion are unacceptable.

Simply put, my position on changing board meeting dates is: "Not for a scheduling conflict for any single board member, including the chairman. Our Constitution provides a vice chairperson position in the event of a chairperson's absence." The chairman can call my position consistency "hate," I call it "integrity."

Another issue upon which the chairman and I disagree: I believe that the day-to-day operations of the tribe need to be handled by a full time employee, not a politician. There are many solid reasons why we should have a CEO of tribal government, and many reasons why this position should also be separate from the CEO of our casinos. AND, there are many, MANY solid reasons why neither one of those positions should be held by an elected tribal chairperson. But, of all the solid reasons I could list to support this separation, there is only ONE THAT MATTERS: In 2008 OUR PEOPLE VOTED TO SEPARATE THEM!

It's true, that in 2012 I voted "yes" to a limited delegation of authority for the chairperson. I was one month old as a board member and I was led to believe that if I didn't vote "yes" that grants wouldn't get signed, payroll wouldn't be authorized and the business of the tribe would quickly come to a grinding halt. Since we didn't as yet have a CEO, I was very alarmed and worried for our tribe. However, I was reassured by language in the resolution (and sagely nods from board incumbents) that caused me to believe this delegation was temporary in nature, and that the board would have oversight UNTIL there was a CEO to take over. Once I learned my lesson and saw the harm to our tribe, I brought forward a resolution to restore the tribal structure to what the people voted for! This

resolution was defeated, but I STILL believe the separation needs to occur. It's not personal to Aaron Payment. This resolution is not, as he claims, "stripping the chairman of his authority." It is restoring the authority of the people, and giving them back what they voted on! Again, the chairman calls it "hate," I call it doing my job.

Now permit me to address another issue that brings me to odds with the chairman. It is referred to as "over the max employees." For three years, I have heard the chairman reference the hundreds of thousands of dollars that the tribe could save YEARLY, if it were not for the actions of previous chairmen, who gave unearned raises of over \$20,000 or more to "family members" and select buddies. The board listened to the tirades and resisted taking action. Despite the current chairman's pleadings to "let the Nazi out of the box" (a disturbing reference to his own ability to be ruthless), the board continued to resist until we were assured that the proposed "over the max" wage adjustment affected a low number of people who actually received some ill-gotten raise.

As it turned out, the number was NOT LOW and was not limited to "ill-gotten raises!" The affected employee count was over 100, and would strike even the lowest wage earners of our tribe! It also would have affected those who have worked for us the longest, and dedicated their working lives to their tribe. Here's the final kicker: the actual saving of tribal dollars is around \$25,000, not \$400,000-plus! The chairman (who is now claiming he had nothing to do with the proposed over the max cuts, and is now blaming the board), would have cut GRANT FUNDED wages, and called it a savings! Typically, if grant dollars are earmarked for wages, that's how it must be spent! You can't decide to spend it on whatever you choose, YOU GIVE THE MONEY BACK! Those dollars are regulated by law.

The proposed over the max cuts would also once again cut casino wages! Cut wages on people who haven't had a raise in years? Harm 100 families to save \$25,000? Unacceptable, and I won't do it. But watch, the allegations are already being thrown around that those board members who voted to stop this madness must be protecting family or friends or are in cahoots with one of the previous chairmen (who, incidentally, have been so vilified by our current chairman that it is embarrassing). I believe in raising our people up, not tearing them down.

I would now like to address the flat out lying of Chairman Payment when he declared that the JKL School would close at the end of this school year due to an expiring tribal lease. He incited parents to organize and "stand with him" against the tribe, to fight against something that didn't exist. This twisted action was so harmful to our children, parents, school employees and

community, that the board of directors was forced to issue the following press release:

Official board statement on JKL Bahweting PSA, published 25 March 2015.

The following was released by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Board of Directors at its March 24, 2015, meeting:

In an effort to clarify any misconceptions regarding the Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting PSA, the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indian is providing the following statements:

- *The current lease between the tribe and the Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting PSA is not expired, nor expiring in the near future.*

- *The tribal board of directors is committed to the future growth of the Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting PSA and all of our community's children.*

- *The tribe is currently working towards expanding the gymnasium and cafeteria areas within the Joseph K. Lumsden*

Bahweting PSA and has previously taken action by resolution to authorize the purchase of the parcels adjacent to the Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting PSA for future expansion purposes.

- *The school is not closing!*

I will never forget the crying grandparents.

I dislike that I had to bring these issues to you, in this very public way. I work hard to maintain positive communications with our tribal citizens and have consistently taken the high road regardless of the personal assaults, but I could no longer remain quiet; the truth needs to be spoken. Our people are being hurt. Senator Elisabeth Warren stated that she is paid to stand up for what she believes in — her words rang true with me. I believe in our people!

Anishinaabe gagige (Anishinaabe for always!),

Jen,

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