

YOU DESERVE BETTER THAN PROTEST VOTES



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“Representing All
Members Everywhere”

I want to begin my report to the Members by apologizing to the Elders for the nominal amount of the annual Elder checks and explain to the Elders why I did not submit a letter to accompany the Elder Dividend checks. Besides the amount having been so drastically reduced since the last time I served as Chair (down from \$1,600 marking nearly a \$1,000 cut), I did not write a letter to try to contextualize the reduction or my efforts to balance the budget because following the letter I sent in November to the Elders to have them register to receive their Elder checks, a Board Member took a rather extreme position and expressed her opposition to the content of the letter. Secondly, yet another Board Member chose to write a negative piece of about this same issue in her unit report. Rather than give more canon fodder in which to object, I choose not to author a letter to accompany the Elder checks. Instead, I simply copied verbatim, the same letter sent for the last two years and asked that the Board author the letter to eliminate any possibility of objection. Unfortunately, there was no agreement among the Board on the letter so, no letter was sent.

VOTING NO OUT OF PROTEST!

We all know that at least a few Board Members did not support the will of the majority of the Members’ elective choice for Chairperson. It has been over seven months and some continue to look for points of opposition. Nonetheless, the Members have spoken. Respect the outcome. In many respects, I am reminded of the kind of incivility in the U.S. Congress where retribution politics have become the norm. Since I have entered office, I have introduced several different pieces of legislation. A select few Board members have voted no on almost every single piece of legislation I have presented. This is unfortunate, because no matter the

content or merit of the legislation I have drafted, some simply vote no.

One example occurred this fall when I introduced a resolution to save nearly \$200,000 annually by collapsing four positions into two. Specifically, I proposed that we combine the Chief Financial Officer position with the Financial Comptroller position and combine the Education Director and Assistant Executive Director for Membership Services positions. By combining these functions from four positions to two, we saved a great deal of money that aided us in balancing the Tribal Budget. Out of protest, some voted no.

A more recent example deals with a proposal to modify the budget to move a low paying grants specialist position into a grants director position. This was a self contained proposal which would not require an additional allocation of Tribal Support dollars yet create a higher level grants function to become more competitive in seeking grants by collecting primary data of Members’ needs. Such an effort would clearly show the greater needs as they exist in the outlying areas. Currently, we must rely on U.S. Census data which chronically under represents our needs. Such a function is desperately needed. Not since I left office in 2008 has our Tribe has had a real commitment here. Currently, though we have many employees who write grants, we do not have even one dedicated grant writer for the Tribe. Unfortunately, the proposal failed to be adopted. When I was in office previously, we not only had a planning director, but an entire division of at least five team members dedicated to grant application, compliance, and data collection and analysis.

In some cases, Board Members have argued that they were not prepared to make a decision. This is difficult to understand given we have a five day notice requirement for all legislation and without exceptions, those items Board Members have voted no on, are items for which they did not ask questions ahead of time or suggest alternative legislation. This is a bit frustrating as it seems the opposition only arises while we are in the meeting and they subsequently vote NO!

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

I think the Members expect us to do things differently. They certainly deserve

better. One such reform I am proposing is to schedule all legislative items for review at least one week in advance to discuss at length any suggestions to improve said legislation so select Board members don’t simply vote no. Meeting an entire week in advance during a legislation mark up session gives us two days (subsequent to discussing draft legislation) to make any needed changes, and to gather any data Board members feel is essential to voting.

Additionally, at the request of some Board members, we are reinstituting what was previously called quarterly updates from the programs, services, enterprises, and operations of the Tribe. Rather than requiring quarterly updates which in the past, a few Board members did not show up for or spent time texting or stepping out of the room for extended periods of time, I am scheduling these to occur semi annually. It is my intent to video record or live stream these sessions so Members can have the benefit of these updates. To do so, however, I will introduce a budget modification to the Tribal Communications budget to cover the additional costs.

ROBBING PETER TO PAY PAUL

Over the last two years, the Tribal Board directed a wage study to determine if governmental and casino team members are paid what the market will bear. They engaged a company called *Payscale* and began the laborious task of reviewing all job descriptions comparing them against normed data for similar positions. Last year, approximately two-thirds of the team members were adjusted to bring them up to at least the minimum of what the market suggests these positions be paid. The remaining one-third did not move up to at least the minimum; probably due to the prior administration’s mixed messages to executive staff about whether or not to comply. Thus, until just recently one-third of the team members languished behind and received less pay than they should have received.

What is even more alarming is that while one-third were underpaid, there is a population of team members who are overpaid to the tune of nearly \$1 million. There are many reasons why they are overpaid and in a few cases, this may even be justified.

However, what is unfortunate is that while a minority of the population of team members just got an adjustment to bring them to the minimum, there are NO RAISES PLANNED for the remaining team members.

This is unacceptable for two reasons. First, the cost of inflation and consumers’ price index suggest that the value of the dollar is worth less tomorrow than it is today. Thus, if there is no raise, people lose ground. This is especially true, with an anticipated health insurance premium jump expected to be significant. The second reason is that while we now have all team members paid at least the minimum and in alignment with the local and regional market, this is made immediately out of date if there is no cost of living increase. In other words, within a year or two, we will need to start all over with another wage study.

SOCIALISM OR COMMON SENSE?

Some might suggest this is *socialistic* type thinking but I would argue that it is a very *capitalistic* perspective. Why pay someone beyond what the market will bear? In some cases, those paid over the max are paid tens of thousands over what the market suggests they should be paid. If we were not to pay them over the max, would they be able to expect similar pay in the regional market? The answer is clearly no. Again, while a select few may be justified, more often than not, these bloated salaries are the lingering vestiges of previous political administrations who rewarded political loyalty.

TRIBAL FUNDS FOR TRIBAL SERVICES

Again, call me a socialist, but I view that the fruit of our efforts should be to provide services and to expand services to our Members. There is a lot we could do with the nearly \$1 million we are over paying those who are paid over the maximum. This amount redistributed would mean about a 1 percent COLA for all team members. Or, it would represent a \$200 increase in our Elder checks. Or, it could easily pay for any additional costs realized for implementation of a new Constitution. Or, it could reinstate the college student scholarships to the \$700,000 we paid out annually when I was Chairperson previously while we now paid out just

over \$150,000. So, while many policy or business decisions suggest it is a policy option to do nothing in this case, we are sitting on nearly \$1 million while all of these other possible benefits are under funded.

BCBS LAWSUIT
GREEK LAWSUIT

A lot of strange things happened after I left office. First, though we were sued by the Greeks and unsecured creditors for over \$170 million, the previous Board has reduced this liability to about \$2.77 million. While one of our former so-called Greek partners is suing us to hold up the settlement, some Board Members continued to push us into new proposals for doing business with the Greeks in New Boston and beyond. This might be explained through reports of a Board Member holding an election victory party in the Greek’s hotel in 2010. It puzzles me that some continue to want to do business with someone who put down \$24,000 and walked away with a \$268 million promise made to the Greeks by the Chairman in 2000.

I am also mystified by the idea that our Tribe could have entered a better health insurance arrangement than the plan in place while I was Chair. For most of my term, there was no premium increase, and our team members (employees) had a health insurance plan comparable to Blue Cross/Blue Shield in every way except annual premium costs and overall costs to the Tribe. Nonetheless, the Board voted to change the employee insurance carrier which cost about \$4 million in additional costs to date. Where this change was to save \$2 million annually, it cost that and then some. The Board recently voted to litigate BCBS as they were manipulated into switching to the Blues. I support this decision, but it occurs to me that we have to do better than to allow ourselves to be manipulated in the first place.

I realize this report has somewhat of a critical tone. For that, I apologize but in order to improve, we must recognize and learn from our mistakes. Since returning to office, I have tried to improve upon our Lansing project and feel we are moving in the right direction. With a bit more cooperation and foresight at the Board level, our future will be brighter than ever.

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