

REPRESENTING MEMBERS AT ALL LEVELS



Aaron A. Payment, MPA
Tribal Chairperson
Representing All Members
Everywhere

CAMPAIGNING RATHER THAN GOVERNING

Recently, a couple of board members approached me to inform me that they were solicited by Director Causley to urge them to run for chairperson against me in the 2016 election. Candidates are not permit to declare and candidacy until January 2016. Nonetheless, the act of scheming to replace me at a time when I have been successful in: balancing our budgets; turning land into trust and saving tribal funds on taxes; securing a record level of federal funds though efforts for treaty rights (\$455,000); Contract Support Costs (\$1.2 million); BCBS settlement (\$1.2 million) and increased involvement in advocating for our people at the highest levels ~ now including the U.S. Secretary of Education and the President, it seems that while I am chair, my efforts should be supported and not sabotaged. Fortunately, these same tactics fell flat in 2012 as I received 57.5 percent of the vote. Elders told me that the candy bars they were giving away just didn't work to buy their vote.

WHITE HOUSE INVITE

By the time this is published, I will have met yet again in the White House with the Obama Administration to discuss the Employer Mandate in the Affordable Care Act for requiring tribes to immediately insure teams members. While I fully support health insurance for team members, I am guarded in terms of our sovereignty. I have given voice to this issue at the HHS Secretary's Tribal Advisory Council for which I serve and during numerous national meetings including at the National Congress of American Indians mid-year conference. I am advocating parity for tribes with states to decide the labor climate in their respective governments. Again, I strongly support health insurance but feel this should be our decision as a tribe for which members can ratify or overturn via right of referendum. We hope to secure concurrence with the Obama Administration for a "technical fix" but we also support legislative efforts working their way through Congress to resolve the matter.

TEAM MEMBER RAISES

I am cognizant of the fact that while I have balanced our budget, team members have waited long enough for a raise. During my first administration, we gave raises every year including our lowest paid team members getting the highest percentage raises (up to 6 percent). We also gave annual Christmas bonuses and contributed up to 2 percent to team

members' 401K retirement plans if they matched our contribution. These were eliminated immediately after I left office in 2008. This was done without the board or chair sharing in these cuts. Upon returning to office, I proposed to cut our pay in half. Since then, we

have dealt with sequestration, government shut downs, and our declining casino revenues (our casinos are under the board NOT the chair). While our markets remain tenuous, I feel we are stable enough to budget for up to 3 percent raises next year and a

nominal return of our 401K match. Thus, I have directed all program managers to include raises and 401K and I am putting forward this proposal.

Chi McGwitch, Negee!



TESTIMONY BY CHAIRPERSON AARON PAYMENT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Committee on Veterans' Affairs: Subcommittee on Health
Oversight Field Hearing ~ September 1, 2015,

While 1.4% of the U.S. population is American Indian, the military population traditionally 1.7 percent have been Native. Proportionately, American Indians are represented at a much higher rate than any population to defend the United States. We are very proud of our warriors ~ both men and women.

The current VA health care system creates barriers to treatment for our Native veterans living in rural areas. In the UP of Michigan, my Tribe has partnered with the American Legion to provide two additional service officers in MI's 1st congressional district. This effort extends outreach activities to veterans who use our health facilities. We provide space to offset costs and are establishing baseline data to more accurately reflect the number of our Tribal veterans.

VETERANS' SERVICES WITHIN THE SAULT TRIBE HEALTH DIVISION

In 2010, our Health Division worked with the Iron Mountain VA to establish an agreement with our optical department in Manistique where we are able to provide optical services to Tribal and non-tribal veterans alike.

The Sault Tribe has also:

- Established a VA workgroup to access additional services for our veterans.
- Partnered with a veteran's service organization, American Legion, to provide benefits and Service officers at tribal clinic sites to assist with issues and questions about navigating the VA bureaucracy;
- Worked to identify tribal veterans as they visit our clinics in order to plan services;
- Worked to incorporate both behavioral health and traditional medicine programs to develop veteran specific services to include PTSD, emotional trauma, etc.;
- Planned awareness outreach to get out the word on tribal and VA services including tribal elders meetings, tribal newspaper, website and video tag line information;
- Worked with the Iron Mountain VA to establish a MOA with the tribe for full reimbursement for providing clinical services to tribal veterans eligible for VA services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Freedom of choice: Our veterans should be free to choose their care based on where they can secure the highest quality services. However, Veterans who choose to utilize tribal health centers and our providers as their primary care sites are not able to access their VA benefits. Currently, the VA Choice Card program does not list tribal clinics as reimbursable entities for providing the care as a referral from the VA. Memorandums of Agreement should be entered immediately. We recommend that Tribal health care programs be reimbursed for both direct service and referred care when Veterans find tribal health programs more accessible or more accommodating to their needs. I urge Congress to instruct the VA to set up a process that allows reimbursement for eligible services provided by Tribes.

Improve public transportation: My tribe has identified a lack of consistent and reliable transportation to access many services that directly impact quality of life, including health, education and employment. Available transportation across the Upper Peninsula is provided only at night (Midnight to 8:35 a.m.), which is of limited use for medical trips. We also found a lack of evening and weekend service, another barrier limiting members' ability to access critical health services. We recommend the VA reimburse tribal governments providing Native veterans transportation to primary and specialty clinics, and follow-up care. Most American Indian veterans live in remote areas of the United States and the cost for transportation to and from Veterans healthcare facilities causes substantial hardships on these veterans seeking service.

Throughout the history of the United States, Native Americans have fought bravely and sacrificed for our country. This proud tradition continues to this day with 24,000 active duty American Indians. The 2010 U.S. Census identified at least 152,000 Native men and women who have served this country in its Armed Forces. All veterans, including our Indian Warriors gave their best. All gave some, some gave all. In turn, they deserve our best ~ the best this country can offer. The Sault Tribe stands ready to be part of the solution..

Chi McGwitch