

Seeing past the hype and counting one's blessings



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Honoring our ancestors

— We are in the season of ghost feasts and Thanksgiving and I love this time of year the most. Good food and good remembrances of our family members who have walked on. An important time to honor the memory of our ancestors, the legacy and heritage they have left in our care.

On Oct. 19, we had a dedication ceremony at the Wequayoc Cemetery to honor Agnes (nee Moses) Paquin for her lifelong determination to keep intact for perpetuity the sacred burial grounds and historic village of our people. We're a big tribal nation but, all things considered, we're a land-poor tribe. I am very grateful to have this beautiful spot along the north shore of Huron. We are grateful to her descendants for their graciousness. I think our ancestors would be pleased as well. I'm certain Agnes is. This land is so important for the history and knowledge it represents. It's when things get forgotten and lost, when the chain of generations get broken, that our Anishnaabe people become lost and forgotten. Storyteller Navarre Scott

Momaday, put it this way, "Never more than a generation from extinction, the need to remember the past while seeking the future is essential to our people."

Tribal business — We've got a cottage industry of Facebook sites out there designed to polarize, factionalize and have you believe "the board" is a greedy, pocket lining, corrupt machine, hell bent on taking food out of babies' mouths and robbing grandma blind. It's a free country. People can spin whatever stories they want to (it might even land you a tribal job). Unfortunately for our tribe, we've got a few self-serving elected officials who are more than happy to manufacture this type of 'hair on fire,' 'sky is falling' hysteria to advance their agenda. And that agenda is nothing more than influencing the next election (and self-promotion). I've been reluctant to call this type of behavior out for what it is — cut throat politics — because I promised the people who live in our community that I would not participate in this type of destructive behavior. And, I also have an abiding faith in the good common sense and intelligence of our people to see through the propaganda. But when I see our people, our employees and our programs and our children pitted one against the other in these hard times, I draw the line.

Thanks to sequestration as well as falling casino revenues, we have to make some hard choices within our governmental operations. We need to reduce our 2014 governmental budget 3.74 percent. That equates to \$3,571,550 (and it may not be enough, depending on what Congress appropriates sometime next year).

Currently, our 2013 budget is \$95,538,611 and 2014 will be \$91,967,061. This reduction was settled upon at a "special board meeting" on Oct. 31. Ironically, it's about what was proposed in early September. But the last two months did give everyone the opportunity to bust open individual department budgets and scrutinize \$90-some million in expenditures, line by line. It's going to be tough. It's going to hurt. Our job — and the job of our departmental managers — is to mitigate the pain as much as possible. The devil will be in the details. It will be the responsibility of department managers to reduce their budgets to accommodate the reduction. They have the drivers: Retain services; Do more with less. We've prioritized our core services to align with our mission and values and we've identified essential operation functions.

Given how difficult this is for our people and our staff, it is a time to stick together and understand that we are all in this together. It is not a time to pit one set of needs against another. Which leads us to another topic that has been mischaracterized on the Internet: board stipends. As mentioned before, some board members took voluntary cuts. I am one of them. Other board members — including the chairman — have not taken a cut with the rationale that it affords them more money to donate to unmet needs within their respective communities. I can respect that. I am certain of their generosity. For myself, an actual reduction seemed best (to assist the 'tribe as a whole') and still back to the community. What with the economic climate, and reduction in foods stamps, we may be fund-

ing community meals very soon, especially the last week of the month when families can't put food on the table. Because that's what community is about and that's what we do.

But, on Oct. 31, the chairman proposed to cut board pay by 50 percent. As expected, it went down in defeat as too harsh for a full-time tenure. I'm just wondering if those who voted "yes" will now voluntarily reduce their pay by 50 percent (I think one individual already does). Given all the above, the chairman has now come forward and asked for an additional 50K for a personal travel budget. Absent our willingness to agree to that demand, he states he will begin a capital fundraising campaign for his travels. We have a current travel budget that he can use. No one else is traveling in order to make all the funds available to him. That seems proper. He is good at what he does on Capitol Hill and other national gatherings. But an additional 50K for personal travel in these hard times? Give me a break! How about a capital campaign to double our food program, or more meal deliveries to our homebound elders?

I'm sorry I've been critical in this report, but these things have to be said. I want to turn the corner and state this sincerely: I support the office of the chair. Whoever holds it. They were elected by the people. We were ALL elected by the people to work together for our common cause. Our chairman is bright, charismatic and quite fantastic at many things (like working the halls of congress to affect change). I just think (in my opinion) he confuses 'campaigning' with actual 'governance.' You

absolutely should be demanding accountability, transparency, truth and honesty from all of us. If you have concerns, by all means pick up the phone and call. Or email your concerns. And — push come to shove — remember, none of your elected representatives have any authority except collectively — when we convene as the board of directors. The tribal minutes, board resolutions and voting matrix are posted on the website for all to see. Trust that before you trust the gossip columns on the Internet.

In conclusion, I want give a big chi miigwech to all our tribal people, our pipe carriers, spiritual leaders, our drums and healing dancers. Miigwech to our hunters and fisherman, our farmers and gatherers, who put food on our tables and keep us warm and clothed. Miigwech to our warriors and veterans who keep us all safe and protected. Miigwech to those who have earned the designation of traditional elders and who share their wisdom and knowledge and give us guidance and direction. Miigwech to all of our elders, grandmothers and grandfathers, uncles and aunts. Miigwech to our children and grandchildren who bring so much love and hope into our lives. And special prayers and remembrance to those who have walked on, especially those who left too soon. Miigwech to the Creator and all living things. And a special prayer of assistance to remember, preserve and protect our language, traditional ways, our waters and our mother earth. Miigwech, miigwech, miigwech. Wishing everyone a blessed Thanksgiving season.