

Chronology of board actions, setting records straight



BRIDGETT SORENSON, DIRECTOR, UNIT III

This is the first unit report I really struggled with writing since being elected. I have had many compliments from people every month, so I know members are reading what I write and I want to continue keeping the membership informed without taking a negative tone. There are so many lies being put out on social media and elsewhere that I feel this is an avenue to combat those lies.

On Oct. 7, we had government financial reviews and the chairman was then predicting 5.2 percent sequestration cuts just seven days after we passed the continuing resolutions where he believed it would be 0 percent or 2 percent. This is the reason I voted "no" on the continuing resolutions, because I believed we needed to start making cuts to the budget proactively.

On Oct. 8, we met and discussed our enterprises. The Lakefront Hotel in St. Ignace is being closed and sold on Oct. 27. The Midjim in St. Ignace is planning on repairing the parking lot next year because it is so cracked up and water pools next to the pumps. It was cold patched this year and needs work again.

On Oct. 9, we had a gaming authority workshop with the CFO, COO and his executive assistant to discuss the IGS audit initial plan they had been working on. These meetings are being held twice a month. Each audit finding is assigned to certain staff with a target end date. This meeting was focused on marketing and communication.

On Oct. 10, I conference called with the insurance ad hoc committee to review the results of the team member survey. We will be bringing the results to the board of directors soon. I would like to thank all the team members who took the time to fill them out and have an opportunity to choose which cost saving options you prefer.

On Oct. 11, I had office hours and then went to our elder meeting. Keith, Denny and I gave updates about the budget and worked on elders' concert ticket concerns. Unit III gets 74 elders' tickets a show and sign up sheets are at the McCann School 30 days prior to the concert. Current rules say you must be 55 years old. There usually is a bus that takes you to the concerts unless they are rented out.

On Oct. 15, we had a workshop and met with ACFS and they had ran out of money to continue the emergency needs program that helps people with travel expenses to doctor appointments out of

town or family emergencies. Our board secretary, Joann Carr, is a member of the Dress Down Committee and asked the committee about funding this program. The committee supported it and donated over \$9,000 to keep the program going. If you need assistance under this program, please contact a direct service worker and you may qualify for up to \$250. Thank you Dress Down Committee!

We had also met with the health division with concern over the special diabetes program grant that had yet to be received. We had letters stating we should be getting the award but no time frame or guarantee. In years past, we had carry over funds from years prior and did not usually receive the award letter until December. The majority of the board was concerned with continued spending with no guarantee of receiving the funds and using tribal support dollars in the mean time to fund the program, which consists of 16 staff members. The program was affected on Oct. 28 with reduced hours. On Oct. 29, we received a funding letter for \$836,409. The staff hours were then re-instated. This was terrible for all staff affected but when you are in a budget crunch you need to make tough decisions.

The casino team member surveys were also discussed and most individual board members had listed their concerns per site that were compiled for each board member to review. We had then decided to meet with the COO on Oct. 22 to give him some smart goals to begin to take action on. We will again be meeting with him on Nov. 12 for updates and more smart goals.

On Oct. 18, I went with the St. Ignace Tribal Head Start class on their field trip to Pond Hill Farms in Harbor Springs. The class went on a hayride, fed fish in the river, fed livestock, shot apples with a giant slingshot, had a picnic lunch and picked their own pumpkins. These kids had a great day and so did I. Head Start is a great program for our kids to learn and socialize and the staff work hard to be positive role models for these kids.

On Oct. 19, I attended the Wequayoc Cemetery Dedication with my mom and niece. There was a good turnout of about 50 people. The tribe received a one-year planning grant to hire a consultant to work with the community to establish burial procedures and long term planning. The dedication was for Agnes Moses, Anna and Larry Grimes as caretakers and owners of the land prior to the tribe purchasing it in 2012.

On Oct. 22, we had our workshop and meeting in St. Ignace. We continued to discuss the budget concerns and possible percentage cuts.

On Oct. 23, we had our gaming authority workshop and met with the CFO, COO and his executive assistant on the audit. This discussion focused on our food outlets. Some areas of concern are food costs, food waste and staffing vs. business needs. The COO gave the board his plan of action and was told the changes would

be happening by Nov. 1. One of my biggest concerns when things happen is communication with our staff. They need to be notified by management what is happening before rumors are circulated. When cutting front line staff, management needs to fill in when staff calls in or when it becomes busy. There are good managers that already do this but many manage from their office.

On Oct. 29, we met on 2014 budgets going by division, cost center and line item. At 6 p.m., we opened our special meeting but reconvened until the next day at 6 p.m. so we could continue to review budgets the next day.

On Oct. 30, we continued on from the previous day. During the meeting we voted not to cut the over the max team members stating various areas of concern such as longevity, board approved annual raises, the list of names changing, etc. We also voted no on reducing the chairman and directors pay by 50 percent. The chairman added this item to the agenda out of retaliation for not voting to add the Special Diabetes Program to the agenda on Oct. 22. His campaign promise was to cut his pay in half and other board members campaigned to reduce their wages and it is up to them what they do. Many members think we make too much money but we make decisions for 40,000 people, over 2,000 team members and over \$100 million dollars in budgets. This is the most stressful, 24/7 position I have ever held and I think you have to serve on here to actually see it for yourself. Many board members did cut their pay and donate thousands of dollars in our community but choose not to talk or brag about it. The current board wage was voted on in 2000 with Aaron Payment motioning and Mike Lumsden supporting it. It called for a yearly cost of living allowance and there has never been one or the board would currently be making over \$92,000 a year. Like I said before I am not in favor of that amount just stating the process. There will be a cut in the board's 2014 budget. The chairman also told our budget department to pull the board's budget out of the overall budget so he could referendum things he may want.

On Oct. 31, we continued our budget reviews and compromised to pass the 2014 budgets with a 5 percent cut to tribal support and a 2 percent cut to federal funding. About half the board wanted a 5 percent cut to tribal support and a 5 percent cut to federal funding to be proactive but were met with some resistance so we compromised by passing the 5 percent and 2 percent and having the CFO and executive director work with their divisions to prepare by Nov. 19 a potential 5 percent federal funding cut for the boards review and, if sequestration hits, we will cut to that percentage. We also included that there will be no new job positions, step increases, cost of living increases, promotions, changes in job title or changes in job responsibility that would affect wages (except for Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care Center commitments

to raise teachers and aides who meet their educational credentials) may be granted except by a budget modification resolution approved by the board at a duly called meeting of the board.

I would like to address some of the rumors that have been circulating, such as that I have breached confidentiality with the casino team member surveys. There are claims that I read the surveys while team members filled them out and wrote some of them myself to get certain people fired. Here is the truth, all the surveys were anonymous, the surveys were all in envelopes and were opened by the board as a group on Aug. 6, and each board member took turns reading a few out of their stack. At the end of the workshop, I took St. Ignace, Hessel and Sault Ste. Marie to bring to our membership liaison to compile the spreadsheet. I sent the liaison a message that I had them and would be bringing them to him on Friday when I had my office hours and I wanted to read them. I read every survey and was concerned that some people may try and not include certain surveys to protect their family, so I photocopied some to have in case that happened. When the liaisons finished compiling the surveys, the chairman offered to merge the document. The board had met and started going over them a few different times. We decided to save time we would all compile our concerns per site and send them to the board secretary to compile and we would then finish going over them and make a plan. Over that weekend when I was compiling my concerns I called fellow board members to ask if I had just overlooked some surveys that we had read and were not there. They didn't remember seeing them either. So I brought it to the board's attention and other board members said they had thought some of theirs were missing also. When the information got relayed to the Chairman he began accusing me and later said the files got merged wrong. I believe that there are people being protected and this is an excuse to get rid of the surveys.

I am also being accused on

social media of wanting to fire certain team members. Apparently any time I ask questions or raise concerns, I want people fired. I will say this, I do not go around saying to fire this one or that one, but I will always say if someone is not doing their job and there is documentation then have at it. The second thing is, why would our leader put hurtful things about our staff on social media with names and personal information? This, to me, creates a hostile work environment. I am tired of this type of conduct and it is hurting our team members, tribal members and the tribe in general.

The chairman has spent much time on the protecting the wolf campaign. I told him last week that I wished he would spend that kind of time convincing the federal government to combat invasive species, since it affects our tribal fisherman's livelihood and our people's subsistence fishing. His next campaign is against the Washington Redskin name. What is the most important topic for you? Do we change the name of the redskin potato too? All of this campaigning is giving him the national attention he desires for his committee appointments to pad his resume since he has told us for the past year he was looking to go to work for the BIA or another federal agency. He has also threatened to destroy our Lansing casino project if we didn't pass the constitution.

A reminder that the LIHEAP (heating assistance program) usually accepts application on Oct. 1 but has not been awarded the grant yet, so the date was pushed back to Nov. 1. The grant has still not been awarded, but they are going to still accept applications. There have also been some changes to the USDA food program that may not find you eligible, so please contact them at 635-6076 for more information. The Unit III Christmas party will be on Dec. 14 at the Little Bear from 1 to 3 p.m. Happy Thanksgiving and spend lots of time with your family! Any concerns please contact me by phone at 430-0536, 643-2123, or email bsorenson@saulttribe.net or bridgett91@yahoo.com.