

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

City Hall: Stop Putting Up Roadblocks to Commerce

To the Editor:

This letter is being written to alert City Hall to the fact that St. Ignace has an economic problem.

I would like to make the people of St. Ignace aware of the reasons why, and hopefully embarrass City Hall into taking action.

First, a couple of years ago, we had a small business with 12 employees move to our town, and over a short period of time it grew to 83 employees. I stopped to visit them several times, as they were in my district as County Commissioner. Each time I asked if anyone from City Hall had been to visit and each time the manager would have the same response, "No." I am certainly not saying that City Hall could have kept the small business here, but it seems to me they could have skipped one of their 45-minute coffee breaks to visit one of the largest private employers in the county. And yes, they did finally visit, once the company announced it was moving.

Second story. Eight months ago, I went to City Council to tell them I wanted to start a new business, which would have employed six or seven people at a little higher than minimum wage, but I had one simple demand. Since I had trouble opening my last business, Jabber Joe's, I wanted a state building inspector to work with my new construction. I already owned the property, and had discussed a grant from the state. This would not have cost the city one dime. Well, you would have thought I was asking for the keys to City Hall. Two City Council members came to me personally, and stated it would never happen; we were asking for too much.

Third story. A year ago, we put a banner on the back of Java Joe's, very much like all the other businesses in town. Well, City Hall couldn't let that go, so we received a letter demanding we remove it immediately, or they would see us in court. We took pictures of all the businesses in town (one had 11 banners, and one had seven and was partially owned by an employee of City Hall). Then we sent letters to all the businesses, warning them of the City's intention. To make a long story short, we were summoned into court over our banner. Can someone in City Hall spell "harassment?"

My point in this letter is not to ask City Hall for anything other than stop putting up your self-imposed roadblocks for new business. There is a point when it just isn't worth it.

Joseph Durm
St. Ignace

Get the Real Facts on Mental Health Board Move

To the Editor:

So that everyone involved has the truth to work with, we believe additional information should be presented to the public regarding your recent story about returning the Hiawatha Behavioral Health (HBH) board to population-based representation.

Chief Executive Officer Sam Harma of HBH failed to mention that returning to board membership based on population is simply rejoining the way the rest of the State of Michigan provides for an equal voice for all citizens in decisions that effect mental health services. Since the 2000 amendment to the law, the only mental health agency to change from the population-based representation is HBH. The rest of the state's mental health agencies have all continued to operate successfully using the original state provision of representation by population.

Mr. Harma stated that he thinks the board runs well with each county having four board members. We feel there are a number of areas within the agency that could be improved with going back to the original population-based representation, particularly with how money intended for client care and treatment is spent. We feel there is too much money being spent on administrative salaries and benefits and board operations, while money for client care and treatment is being cut.

Over the years, we have objected to the high salaries and lavish retirement programs provided the top managers in addition to Mr. Harma's personal-use SUV.

We have objected to HBH paying its board member \$65 per meeting

when Chippewa County commissioners are paid only \$45 per meeting. We think the numerous board retreats and workshops and training sessions could be reduced in number, structured to eliminate overnight stays, and held in HBH building sites rather than casinos and resorts.

The Mackinac County commissioners may want to take a closer look at the numbers and the dollars before they rush to support Mr. Harma and his scare tactics. These decisions need to be based on real facts. According to the numbers published in *The St. Ignace News* and the *Manistique Pioneer Tribune*, Mackinac County has 20% of the HBH service population, compared to Schoolcraft at 13%. Why, then do only 15% of HBH clients come from Mackinac County, while 17% of HBH clients are from Schoolcraft? Why does Mackinac County have only 9% of the employees, while Schoolcraft has 41% of the employees? It appears Mackinac County residents are being shortchanged in services and are not receiving their fair share of high paying jobs when compared to Schoolcraft County.

The movement of the administrative offices to the Sault or St. Ignace would provide more money for client care and treatment by reducing the 200-plus overnight administrative stays in Sault motels each year, and the wasted time administrators spend driving from Manistique to the Sault and St. Ignace. It would also reduce the higher salaries now being paid to key employees to get them to live in isolated Manistique.

Mr. Harma mentions a supposed agreement made to keep the administrative offices in Manistique. We have thoroughly researched and FOIAed all existing records and have found nothing to verify his statement.

We feel it is time that HBH was changed from a money-making machine for Schoolcraft County into a true mental health agency serving the residents of the three county area in the most efficient manner. With the change, it might even be possible to do something about the startling rise in local suicides.

The people of Chippewa County have no desire to "take over" HBH. We just want the same equal voice that all the other residents of Michigan have in the decisions made by their mental health agency.

Don and Chris McLean
Brimley

Too Many Accidents on Mackinac Trail

To the Editor:

On February 14, 2008, once again driving on Mackinac Trail to work at the casino, one of our co-workers was in an accident. The car she was driving rolled over because of the icy conditions on the road. Since this winter has started, there have been at least 13 accidents that I know of on this road. This road is never salted. It is the most traveled road in Mackinac County, and it is the least taken care of. I want to ask the County Road Commission why. Why do they keep hearing of accidents, and I know that people are calling them and asking to salt or sand, but they don't respond? My daughter was traveling on Mackinac Trail a few years ago with two of her friends, and as I was watching out the window, I saw her hit a tree, head on. That was a devastating thing to watch, all because they will not taken care of the road. Does someone have to get killed before they will open up their eyes?

Lisa Brolia
St. Ignace

Coon and Lucchesi Receive Jail Time for Wetland Violation

Driving off-road vehicles through Great Lakes coastal wetlands on Drummond Island, disturbing osprey nesting habitat, has resulted in fines for Michael Edward Coon of Hancock and Michael Donald Lucchesi of Houghton.

Chippewa County District Court Judge Michael W. MacDonald accepted a guilty plea and sentenced Mr. Coon and Mr. Lucchesi to serve five days in jail and pay a fine of \$2,500 plus \$155 in court costs and fees in connection with illegal dredging and filling of state

regulated wetlands, it was announced February 4.

Judge MacDonald ordered the defendants to file with the court a plan to restore the wetland areas to their original condition in accordance with Department of Environmental Quality requirements, and to have the plan completed by June 30.

The defendants are required to provide a letter to the residents of Drummond Island through a local newspaper regarding the violation and terms of their sentence.

Legislative Luncheon To Be Feb. 22

A Legislative Luncheon is planned for Friday, February 22, at 11:30 a.m. at the Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall in Cheboygan.

Speakers will include State Senator Jason Allen, State Representative Kevin Elsenheimer, and other

local officials.

Tickets will be \$15. This event is sponsored by several local banks and hosted by the Cheboygan Area Chamber of Commerce.

For reservations, call (231) 627-7183.

St. Ignace News Policies

Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

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Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Clash of the Titans Over Indian Casinos

The quest on Capitol Hill by two Upper Peninsula tribes to gain downstate land for casinos is grandly described by the *Washington Post* as "a fierce multimillion lobbying battle of a scale not seen since fall of Jack Abramoff," imprisoned defrauder of Indians and others.

But U.S. Representative Bart Stupak (D-Menominee), whose district includes homelands of two of the combatants, the Bay Mills Indian Community and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, calls the description "highly overstated."

In a phone interview, he said the legislation, approved by the House Natural Resources Committee last week, is not so much a "titanic battle" on the national scene as it is "a Michigan delegation food fight" among members "trying to protect their own turf."

Two top delegation titans are on opposite sides of the legislation that would settle century-old land claims by allowing casinos in Romulus and Port Huron in exchange for the settling of 110 acres of land claims around Charlotte Beach in the Upper Peninsula:

For: House Dean John Dingell (D-Dearborn), powerful chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee and mentor of Stupak, who heads the committee's high-visibility Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. Dingell, whose district includes Romulus, insists that the issue is about a legitimate land claim.

Among those allied with Democrats Stupak and Dingell on this issue is Representative Candice Miller (R-Macomb County), who represents Port Huron. (Now a faint blip on the crystal ball, but Miller and Stupak are potential opposing contenders for governor in 2010.)

In committee testimony on the legislation earlier this month, Miller said: "Much of the opposition is based purely on greed. Now that the city of Detroit has theirs, they don't want anyone else to have one."

Against: House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers Jr. (D-Detroit), allied with the Congressional Black Caucus and beleaguered Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick of Detroit, site of three commercial casinos.

The Interior Department opposes the legislation, saying it would circumvent its role in reviewing gambling compacts between tribes and the states.

Quite possibly the opponent to be most feared by supporters of the legislation is Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nevada), whose Las Vegas constituents include gaming managers with big stakes in Detroit casinos. Michigan Senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow support the legislation.

This is more than an intramural Michigan food fight. Representative Dale Kildee (D-Flint), who supports the legislation and is co-chairman of the Congressional Native American Caucus, said in the *Washington Post*: "It'll be a real lobbying effort on both sides. Whenever you combine gaming and money to be made, you find a lot of people interested who were never interested in Indians before."

The *Post* said: "The two sides have accused one another of the sort of tactics Abramoff's lobbying team made famous, including creating front groups to gin up anti-gambling sentiment.

Opponents charge that the

tribes' legal position rests on a sham land purchase secretly engineered by one of the casino developers.

"Michael Malik, developer of one of the proposed casinos, is a business partner of Marian Ilitch, whose family owns a casino, hockey's Detroit Red Wings, and baseball's Detroit Tigers. Ilitch and their family members have given \$393,000 to members of Congress in the past two election cycles. On the other side, MGM Mirage is the biggest contributor to members of Congress, giving \$1.4 million in the past two cycles."

The paper said the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, which operates the Soaring Eagle Casino in Mount Pleasant, "and sees the legislation as a threat to its business, has given \$394,000."

Also at play here, as it has been through the ages, is whether deals made will be deals kept. The state made a deal on this with the tribes in 2002, but the feds have the final word on this.

Earmarks

The slipping in of special earmarks in congressional appropriations bills without debate or prior congressional committee or administration review is widely condemned by President Bush, GOP presidential contender John McCain, and others.

Last week, after Taxpayers for Common Sense, a group critical of earmarks, reported that Stupak led Michigan Democrats in the House with \$5.1 million in earmarks for fiscal year 2008, he said in a conference call with Michigan reporters: "I am very proud of the earmarks we have. I don't make any excuses."

The tally for the two Republicans representing the northern Lower Peninsula: Representative Pete Hoekstra of Holland, \$833,000, and Dave Camp of Midland, \$490,000.

Call to Duty

Hours before last week's convening of the Republican State Convention, state Representative Jack Hoogendyk emerged as the favorite to oppose Senator Carl Levin.

He filed papers for the race and former state House Majority Floor Leader Andrew "Rocky" Raczkowski, Levin's 2002 challenger and the choice of top party leaders to run again, revealed that he will not run because he has been called back to active duty as a major in the Army Reserve.

"You don't have to be on the ballot to serve your country," said Raczkowski, who won a Bronze Star while commanding a special operations unit in the Horn of Africa after getting a mere 38% of the vote against Levin. "We had innovative fundraising plans. But I have no control over this. It's not the best timing of my life."

In the months before going on active duty, likely back to Africa or to Afghanistan or Iraq, he said he will do all he can to "help Jack and the Republican ticket."

Hoogendyk, who abandoned a 2006 race for governor and last year, was the most conservative House member, according to an *Inside Michigan Politics* newsletter review of votes on 30 issues. He will need much help, as Levin is heavily favored to win a sixth term.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

Sault Police Investigate Vehicle Larceny

The Sault Ste. Marie police are investigating a larceny from a motor vehicle in the 100 block of West Spruce Street. The theft occurred January 22 at 12:45 p.m. near the hospital. Stolen was a black zippered wallet from a purse containing \$68, a driver's license, and credit cards. The suspect was

a white male, 50 to 60 years of age, of thin build, wearing a brown Carhart jacket and blue knit hat.

Anyone with information may call Crime Stoppers at (800) 465-7867. Callers may remain anonymous and tips leading to an arrest could earn a \$1,000 reward.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.