

STREET TALK

Hot In Here

By Business Journal Staff

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In the past, when Gun Lake Tribe Chairman **D.K. Sprague** spoke of his nation's detractors (namely 23 is Enough, MichGo and related groups) he was careful not to use what he called "the R-word."

He had experienced tomahawk-chop chants and slurs on several occasions from individuals who may or may not be representative of the luminaries and powerbrokers spearheading 23 is Enough (those incidents at public meetings were documented in a local daily newspaper and Wayland's Penasee Globe), but Sprague stayed on message, that of the economic development aspects of the project.

The gloves came off last week.

An e-mail blast far and wide from 23 is Enough lobbyist **John Helmholtz** cited a New York activist the Tribe argues is a textbook bigot. The Tribe is calling on Republican gubernatorial candidate **Dick DeVos**, U.S. District Judge nominee and Warner, Norcross & Judd partner **Robert Jonker** and all other elected officials connected with 23 is Enough to withdraw support. The Tribe issued a statement saying, "Robert Jonker's membership in a group that disseminates the views of an anti-Native American raises serious issues about his fitness to serve as a federal judge. Given his membership in 23 is Enough, and his involvement in the Blue Chip Casino anti-competition efforts, serious questions should be raised by the U.S. Senate regarding Jonker's confirmation to federal judgeship."

The statement further reads: "The Tribe's sovereignty and legal rights are inseparable from its race and cultural history. Because opponents are trying to deny the Gun Lake Tribe's sovereign rights, in essence they are discriminating based on race. 23 is Enough either knowingly disseminated the materials of a bigot, or they did not do their homework in checking their sources. Either way they were wrong. This proves what the Tribe has said all along: 23 is Enough is not a credible source of information.

"The opposition has never had credible sources. The paramount example being the bought and paid for Anderson economic study, which to no one's surprise reached the flawed conclusion that casinos provide economic benefit everywhere in the state except

Grand Rapids. (Frank) Parlato is another biased and unreliable source from 23 is Enough.”

Tribal Council Treasurer **John Shagonaby** said, “We are asking for an apology both to the Tribe and those that received the e-mail. This deplorable incident proves once and for all that they are not to be taken seriously.”

The late-July e-mail contained an opinion piece written by **Frank Parlato Jr.** a Niagra Falls-area developer and widely quoted expert on Indian culture — the Hindu kind. His views on tribal gaming, as seen in the e-mail and on his Web site (www.frankreport.com), are identical to local activists such as **Peter Secchia** and **Mike Jandernoa**, but he illustrates these views with cartoons of Native Americans scalping people and **General George A. Custer**.

“We are now convinced that 23 is Enough will stop at nothing to advance its own agenda. These millionaires and billionaires have now stooped to a new low in aligning themselves with a hate-monger like Frank Parlato Jr., in using his rhetoric to pursue its anti-competition goals. Anyone associated with this group should be ashamed.”

This is perhaps the deadliest blow the Tribe has struck to 23 is Enough’s cadre of lawmakers: A handful of politicians have already severed ties.

DeVos spokesman **John Truscott** told Gongwer News that the group’s honorary chair let them use his name early on, but isn’t actively involved with the group on a day-to-day basis, although he does still oppose gaming expansion. “I think that would be inappropriate for them to include Dick DeVos in that statement (of racism). There’s no way that he could be considered anti-Native American.”

Mark Meadows, the East Lansing Primary Election pick as Democratic candidate for state representative, told the Business Journal he plans to return a campaign donation from 23 is Enough based on the offensive cartoon, but that his views on gaming expansion have not changed. “Gambling is not the answer to the economic problems facing this state,” he said.

Grand Rapids Representative **Mike Sak**, the most prominent local (and perhaps only) Democrat aligned with the group, dismissed the allegations entirely.

“I do not believe or agree with the Tribe’s allegations,” he said. “There are no racists in 23 is Enough. It is unfortunate that someone did not check out this individual, and this cartoon turned up that is deplorable, inappropriate and unacceptable. These are emotional issues, but it’s just a mistake they’ve exploited. The only issue 23 is Enough is concerned with is the economic impact a new casino will have on West Michigan and the state.”

Helmholdt, the 23 is Enough lobbyist and author of the original e-mail, called the Tribe’s actions “a smear campaign,” which is exactly what those who remain unaligned with the 23 is Enough group have said of the lobbyist’s tactics, including many prominent

business leaders trying to keep the mud off their backs.

Tribe lobbyist **James Nye** argued that sovereignty and legal rights are inseparable from the Tribe's race and cultural history, so by trying to deny sovereign rights, opponents are in essence discriminating based on race. **BJX**

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