

Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi



Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 30, 2012

Contact: Frank Cloutier: (989) 775-4076
Cell: (989) 330-3028

Michigan Tribes Condemn Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero for Racial Slur toward Native Americans in Profane Tirade

(Lansing, Mich.) – Today, two federally recognized tribal governments called on City of Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero to issue a public apology for using a racial slur toward Native Americans. Bernero’s statements were witnessed by hundreds of people at the City-owned Lansing Center on Thursday January 26.

Bernero repeatedly used profanity, and racial slurs, in describing the controversy that ensued after he and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians announced plans for an off-reservation casino at the Lansing Center; 287 miles from that Tribe’s government offices. Parents with children in attendance were visibly upset by Bernero’s behavior. Bernero appeared on stage with a bull’s-eye pasted on his back to suggest he is under fire from bows and arrows.

The inappropriate remarks were made at the politician’s breakfast fundraiser. Bernero was the Democratic nominee for governor in the 2010 election. He was defeated by Governor Rick Snyder.

“We call on Mayor Bernero to issue a public apology, take sensitivity training, and refrain from racially-charged language in the public discourse,” said Dennis Kequom, Chief of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. “Racial slurs by government officials against Native Americans conjure images of a bygone era of destructive policies that resulted in centuries of genocide and poverty.”

Earlier in the week Bernero told reporters that he has sought an off-reservation Indian casino in Lansing since 2005. Since then he spoke to a number of federally recognized Indian tribes.

“The mayor’s remarks are particularly offensive in light of the fact that he has partnered with the Sault Tribe on his casino aspirations. I call on my fellow chairmen across Indian Country, especially the Sault Tribe chairman, to join me in condemning these vile remarks. A racial slur is made against not one of us, but all of us,” said Kequom.

The Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi and Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe raised numerous substantive arguments against the proposed off-reservation casino. Both tribes object because the Sault Tribe’s land claims legal theory would lead to unlimited off-reservation casinos, and abolish the regulatory structure of Indian gaming which is essential to its continued viability. The Sault Tribe would also breach the tribal-state compact requirement (Section 9) to obtain a written agreement by all federally recognized tribes prior to seeking an off-reservation casino.

- # # # -