

May 28, 2013

Dear Oregon Representatives,

I am opposed SB 215 and urge you to defeat it. This bill would cause jurisdictional problems between Tribes and, most of all, could potentially allow civil rights violations and racist stereotyping to continue in Oregon's public schools.

While I respect Oregon's Tribes, I don't believe any single Tribe should have the right to endorse an Indian mascot in Oregon's public schools. There are 566 recognized Tribes in America. Some Tribal cultures don't even allow photographs to be taken of their people or their land. How would a child/ parent from one of those Tribes feel if his or her school had a racist Indian mascot? Our schools must operate under universal policy to ensure that there are no hurtful stereotypes that are offensive to any students or their families, regardless of their race. With over 150 Tribes represented by the over 9,500 Native American students in Oregon public schools, it is unfair to imagine that any one Tribe could be allowed speak for the civil rights of all those individual Native American students.

Allowing any racist Indian mascot stereotypes to continue means that there would be no control of how the use of the mascot might be abused by the greater community. In my Molalla district, which has a cheap clip art, historically inaccurate, cartoon Indian mascot in a warbonnet, the phone company uses it for ads. The local paper writes headlines like:

Hammer Molalla Indians

Indians skid

Indians conquer

Indians crush

Indians run over

Indians claw

Indians kept digging

Molalla Indians pounded

Indians execution was sloppy, their energy was lacking

Indians fall to Indians (when the "Scappoose Indians" play the "Molalla Indians")

Native Americans, our smallest minority by far, don't deserve to be maligned, even unintentionally, by slogans like those headlines. It would be destructive to a student's self worth to have his or her race portrayed in such a manner. We would never allow headlines like "Blacks skid" or "Latinos pounded" in our society – why would we allow this kind of racist disrespect to continue? Just the use of a generic "Indian" is insulting to the highly diverse cultures of the 566 Tribes in our nation. We need to honor the ongoing struggles by Tribes to protect and enhance their unique cultures and histories, not lump them into one generic "Indian in a warbonnet" Disney-esque mythical "Indian".

Oregon public schools can't risk allowing students to believe that any racist stereotyping is permissible. Research proves that allowing Indian mascot stereotypes in schools

transmits a message that other races are fair game for stereotyping. We already have huge problems with bullying and racism in our public schools. To pretend that any one Tribe has the right to ignore facts about the harm done by racist stereotyping and to approve race based Indian stereotypes flies in the face of the decades of studies by educational and psychological experts – studies all carefully vetted and posted last year when our State Board of Education held its highly inclusive hearings regarding the mascot ban.

Change is always difficult. Symbols like Indian mascots that once seemed innocent over the decades in America have come to be understood as civil rights violations. Please don't void all the research done by our State Board of Education to reach the ban. The issue of "letting Tribes decide" was addressed by current State Board Chair Artemio Paz and Board member Samuel Henry when they rejected that idea, saying in the Oregonian last spring:

"There's a collective right that exists here," said board Vice Chairman Artemio Paz. "These sorts of mascots produce "racism and unnecessary bullying. We do not allow that to exist for any of our populations."... It leads to racist comments and negative messages for many of those people in the Native American population," he said. "Why we should search for acceptable levels does not resonate."

Another member, Samuel Henry, said he'd read at least 25 studies on the topic while he deliberated. "I could not find any research that substantiated the use of those mascots."

None of the proponents of Indian mascots have been able to refute the volumes of research produced by professional educators and psychologists that conclusively define the harm done, not just to Native American students but to all students, when racist Indian mascot stereotypes are allowed in public schools.

Vote NO on SB 215 – we can't afford any level of racism or civil rights violations to continue in Oregon's public schools. Every student deserves a level chance at success; allowing any potential barriers to success to stand, like racist Indian mascots, is unconscionable.

There is NO acceptable level of racism we can tolerate in our public schools!

Sincerely,
Susan Hansen
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Molalla Oregon