

A few weeks ago, three board members of the Molalla River School District, along with their superintendent, Tony Mann, traveled to Grand Ronde to visit several Tribal Council members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. While it was not the purpose of the visit to discuss the “mascot” bill, SB 215, it was interesting, and not altogether unexpected, that the topic came up.

What was interesting is that we were told how tribal leaders had been displeased with the way that the Oregon Department of Education handled the “mascot” ban, and had made sweeping decisions with little or no consultation with the leaders of the tribes most affected.

It also was interesting that tribal leaders seemed to feel as we do: that it is important—with or without the “mascot” ban—to work with one another, and to keep an open line of two-way communication, allowing each group to understand the other’s problems and concerns, and to help non-tribal communities educate their children about the true history and culture of the Indians who were once the only inhabitants of our area.

CTGR has developed a curriculum to share, and continues working on other education initiatives that they wish to spread more broadly across our region. They want us to learn about them, not just the “generic” plains Indian that so many ban supporters complained about. Yet, I heard it said: “It is better to be remembered with a mascot than to be forgotten.”

It is unfortunate that it took the mascot ban to get us to finally come together, and learn more about one another. Those of us who visited from Molalla plan to continue efforts to keep the dialog going, regardless of the outcome of SB 215. But it’s important to note that we all have many concerns in our daily lives, and all but one of us are volunteers, with little time to spend outside of work, family and other commitments. Our volunteer terms will surely end, and others will take our places. When that happens, and we are gone, what will be the impetus, the incentive, for others to keep the dialog going.

I learned so much on that short visit. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde was established in the winter of 1856 when the federal government forced member tribes to cede their ancestral lands and relocate to a 60,000-acre reservation in Oregon’s Coast Range. Beginning with the Rogue River and Chasta tribes in southern Oregon, their own “Trail of Tears” began to move northward, with other tribes joining the march as they passed their homelands. During the journey, many died from the harsh winter conditions.

The main point I wish to make is that it is important for local communities and CTGR’s leaders to work together, to build trust, and build an inter-relational plan that continually encourages both parties to work together to continue educating children about the CTGR.

With the “mascot” ban, the sad history of how these people were treated has now continued in our own history. To avoid continuing to repeat the past, we need to learn, and to teach such histories to future generations. We need to invest in and deploy curricula and teachers. But how can we do that if we are, once again, having to deal with an unfunded mandate from the

state, i.e., the “mascot” ban? Where will the money come from if we are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars buying new stationery, replacing uniforms, repainting gym floors and hallways, and so on, and so on?

Not using SB 215 to create a path for Indians and non-Indians to both win in the “mascot” debate, will end up doing far more harm than good. It will be just another example of the “white man’s” disregard for the rights of the people of a sovereign nation.

Sincerely,
Linda Eskridge