

The Honorable John Kitzhaber  
160 State Capitol  
900 Court Street  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Kitzhaber:

As leaders of Oregon Tribes, we write to provide our views on how the school mascot prohibition affects the government-to-government relationship. This letter is not a statement on Senate Bill 215, the bill that created an exception to the ban on Native mascots, or on your veto of the bill. The bill did recognize a needed expansion of the relationship between our tribes and nearby public schools that deserves serious attention. We are concerned that the decision to veto was made without consultation with the tribes that supported the bill.

We do not need to discuss the importance of the state-tribe government-to-government relationship; you know it better than any state leader. Your understanding led to your early support of several government-to-government bills, including the Tribal Law Enforcement Act of 2011, Senate Bill 412. Within two years of taking effect, the law is now in effect on every reservation with a tribal police force. That fact shows how important SB 412 is to making our communities safe. You made history when you signed the bill on the Coos Reservation. At the signing, you asked the tribes and the Legislative Assembly to bring more such bills for your signature. Some tribes thought they honored your request with support of the final version of SB 215. Though some of us did not take a position on the bill, we agree that SB 215 would apply the government-to-government principle at the local level. Schools wanting to retain an Indian mascot still have to demonstrate to the local tribe that they would only do so respectfully. The school would have to continue showing this respect to keep the mascot.

We write out of deep concern about loss of memory and cultural awareness in Oregon. It is a memory gap that we struggle with every day. So few of our neighbors have any memory of our great heritage, a heritage of respect for our fellow creatures that maintained harmony here for many millennia and was described by settlers as an Eden. Native school names certainly simplify Native heritage and can reflect cultural insensitivity but they keep some awareness of our ancestors alive in these communities. True cultural awareness is impossible without tribal involvement in presentation of our history and use of any Native images by a school. Communication between our peoples, in turn, depends on this awareness being present for students in our public schools. The name issue was different ten years ago over a single word. Then, our Tribes were unanimous in urging elimination of the word "squaw" on Oregon geographic features and streets. Denigrating as the word had become, it had the value of keeping alive some echo of our ancestors' presence throughout Oregon. We did not mean to replace this word with nonnative names and lose the spark of memory it still struck. We have worked hard to have names honoring our ancestors returned to these streams and hills. Erasing school names

with no prospect of Native reference of schools also risks the loss of cultural memory among fellow Oregonians.

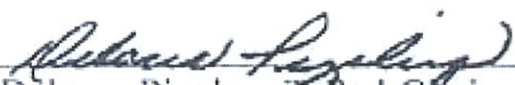
The testimony against SB 215 demonstrated lack of knowledge about the Oregon way reaching agreement and a distrust of Oregon Tribes. You understand, as a leader in promoting agreements with tribes, that our governments have a strong focus on the well-being of our youth and the critical importance of high quality education to further tribal, state, and individual member's goals. You have seen how diligently our people work--from the Legislative Assembly to the county commission to the school board—to weave solutions that honor the needs of the entire community surrounding them. Not least of these was the Spirit Mt. Community Fund solution that you crafted with the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon. Those advocating for a national approach to solving the mascot problem seem not to recognize the successes you have achieved with the Oregon Health Plan and Oregon Solution among others. Oregon does not solve its problems by following a national model; we design, build the model for our success and then bring the success story to national attention.

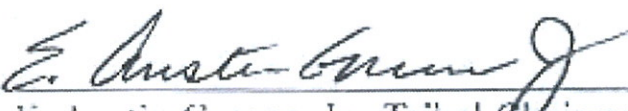
This is why we object to the lack of consultation with tribes prior to the veto of SB 21. Especially because this bill was the only one vetoed in 2013, it is striking that no discussion with tribal leaders took place. The Attorney General engages in government-to-government consultation over requests for amicus briefs in cases brought by states against tribes. Surely laws that directly affect tribes deserve a similar process. So we ask that there be government-to-government consultation on any bill supported by tribes during your consideration of a veto.

We are concerned, too, that consultation on the school name issue is not occurring even as the Legislative Assembly prepares to consider another Native mascot exception bill. We request that this take place soon, at least with the tribes that have expressed support for a legislative solution to the complete ban on Native names for public schools.

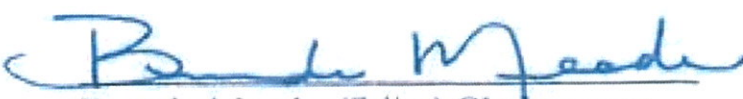
Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

  
Delores Pigsley, Tribal Chairman  
Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

  
E. Austin Greene, Jr., Tribal Chairman  
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

  
Gary Burke, Board of Trustee Chairman  
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian  
Reservation

  
Brenda Meade, Tribal Chairperson  
Coquille Indian Tribe