

Freedmen issue on detour to Capitol Hill

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — A dispute involving race and tribal identity that was supposed to play out in the courts now seems headed for Capitol Hill, where some lawmakers want the country's second-largest Indian tribe stripped of \$300 million in federal money.

U.S. Rep. Diane Watson, a California Democrat who claims Indian blood and ties to Oklahoma, is demanding the Cherokee Nation reinstate 2,800 descendants of the tribe's former black slaves, known as freedmen. She calls a March election that booted the freedmen descendants from the tribe "ethnic cleansing" and doesn't want to wait on the courts to decide the matter, a process that could take years.

The tribe is digging in to fight

the legislation, and its chief, Chad Smith, has called Watson's bill a "scorched-earth" policy aimed at hurting the poorest and sickest of the nation's 270,000 members.

Neither side shows signs of giving up ground as lawmakers are expected to have a hearing on the matter next week in Washington.

At stake are millions of federal dollars for health clinics, Head Start programs, elderly care and housing assistance for the Tahlequah-based tribe. More than 6,000 nation employees could lose their jobs, touching off a ripple effect that would economically devastate north-eastern Oklahoma. Health care to 126,000 patients would be axed.

"If the Cherokee Nation

were to fold, I'd be with it," said David Rabon Comingdeer, a 15-year employee of the nation. "It would be like our whole world just fell out from under us."

But to Watson, those are consequences the nation should have thought of before the election was called.

"We can't even fund education properly or health care properly," said Watson, whose bill has 23 co-sponsors, including support from Congressional Black Caucus lawmakers. "Why should we fund this kind of disenfranchisement?"

Watson wants Chief Smith and his supporters "to come to their senses and see this is throwing out the blacks, and using federal dollars to do it."

"I stand on the law, I stand on what's right, and I'm not go-

ing to massage it for phony reasons," she said.

For decades, descendants of freed Cherokee slaves fought to reclaim their citizenship, even though they were adopted into the tribe in 1866 under a treaty with the U.S. government.

A ruling last year by the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court held that the Cherokee constitution assured freedmen descendants of tribal citizenship.

That led to a petition drive for a ballot measure to determine who is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation.

In March, nearly 77 percent of Cherokee voters decided in a special election to amend the nation's constitution to remove the freedmen descendants and other non-Indians from tribal rolls.

Ex-coach paints new mascot design

WARRENTON, Ore. (AP)—Visiting teams' questions about the mural of the Warrenton High School mascot used to make former basketball coach Tim Peitsch squirm.

Peitsch says he never quite understood the image on the gymnasium wall: a headdressed man with a hooked nose and bloodshot eyes, wearing athletic pants and moccasins, carrying a tomahawk and arrows but no bow, and trying to dribble a deflated basketball.

The 41-year-old depiction of the Warrenton Warriors' mascot was one of the first things visitors saw when they entered the gym.

But under Peitsch's hand, a new, culturally sensitive representation of American Indians is taking shape in the Warrenton gym, even as the state considers a ban on Native American mascots, team names and

logos—risking a potential uproar over an issue historically left up to individual schools and school districts.

At least 16 Oregon schools sport native mascots and nicknames, which the state might prohibit. The schools will soon receive invitations to an Oct. 22 "stakeholders meeting" to discuss possible policy changes at the Department of Education, officials announced Monday.

But Peitsch isn't worried about the looming prohibition.

With the new mural, he said, "The issue isn't so much the Warriors and the way they're portrayed; you have an image and an idea that the tribe fully supports. That's good for everybody."

Principal Rod Heyen agreed. "Over time, there were things that just weren't right and things that were flat-out wrong" with the old image, he said. "The

caricature we had up there was demeaning. It was wrong whether we had to change our mascot or not.

"I look at this as a mural that's a tribute to the Native Americans in this area. I don't see it as a mascot issue."

The new mural spans 12.5 feet by 17.5 feet, featuring a canoe rowed by men representing the Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes. Their muscles flex as they slice paddles through a churning Columbia River. Saddle Mountain towers in the background.

All symbols and imagery have official approval from the Clatsop-Nehalem tribes, said tribal council chairwoman Diane Collier of Warrenton. She said the group gave Peitsch a letter of endorsement to protect the mural as the mascot controversy plays out at the state level.

Spirit Lake Nation considering hog farm

ST. MICHAEL, N.D. (AP)—Developers are considering a hog farm on the Spirit Lake Nation reservation, and not all members of the tribe are happy about it.

Theresa Allery, a board member of the Native American People Cooperative and coordinator for Hog Hoop Barn Development, said officials hope to use federal grant money to produce organic vegetables and build the hog facility.

Daryl Dukart, general manager of Cloverdale Growers Alliance, a group of growers who produce for Mandan-based Cloverdale Foods Co., said the reservation project would include nine barns that each could handle about 200 pigs. Each barn would handle three batches of pigs a year, he said.

"We can turn out 4,860 pigs annually," Dukart said.

They likely would be imported from Canada, raised in the barns and then shipped to Cloverdale's processing facility in Minot, he said.

Bill Patrie, director of the Northcountry Cooperative Development Fund, said the pork could be marketed as "Native American-raised hogs" and sold to tribal casinos in the state.

Dukart said straw would be put on the floor of the barns to reduce odors and help heat the structures, which would have tarps for roofs.

"Hoop barns are the least expensive way to get into hog production that we could find," Patrie said. "They are environmentally friendly and inexpensive."

Tribal member Frank BlackCloud said he worries about damage to the environment from the hog farm. He said he has seen hog farms on other reservations, and "I hate to see a nightmare like that up here."

Patrie said officials are only gauging interest, and have not yet even identified possible sites for a hog farm.

Tribal member Noreen Cavanaugh said she would not hesitate to fight a hog farm. "I would be willing to initiate a petition against it," she said.

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