

'This is very difficult, delicate work'

MASCOTS continued from front page

Braves, Chiefs and Indians.

However, state legislators became involved in the controversy and eventually passed a bill that was signed by then-Gov. John Kitzhaber that mandated that the Board of Education create exceptions to its outright ban on Native mascots.

In all, 15 Oregon high schools would have been affected by the ban. The schools included the Amity Warriors, which until just a few years ago had a parent dress up for basketball games in what was supposed to be an Indian costume that featured a big plastic head with a huge nose, and the Molalla High School Indians, who allowed a student to dress up for football games wearing moccasins, buckskin pants, a feather headdress and a big, red target painted on his chest and back.

The new resolution and rule will allow the state's nine federally recognized Tribes to work with schools to keep potentially racist imagery from being perpetuated in Oregon.

The new resolution would allow the schools affected to keep their Native mascots if they reach a formal agreement with a local Tribe on what imagery associated with their school mascots is acceptable. Essentially, the board placed the decision about Native mascots within the purview of Oregon Tribes.

Grand Ronde Tribal member and Tribal Lobbyist Justin Martin said the agreement between the board and the Tribes is an historic government-to-government accord that allows Oregon Tribes their rightful place at the decision-making table as sovereign nations.

"This is very difficult, delicate work," said Board Vice Chairman Charles Martinez during the hearing held in Salem. "I have great admiration and respect for this board and for the Oregon Department of Education. This board is steadfast in its commitment to Oregon students in the best way possible.

"Putting this decision back in the hands of the Tribes to work on these issues and to move through these exceptions when it makes sense may be the most respectful act we

can make as a board."

Board Chair Miranda Summer started the hearing by thanking the Grand Ronde Tribe for meeting with her and board member Anthony Veliz on Jan. 8 to explain the reasons behind the Tribe's support for exceptions to an all-out ban of Native mascots.

The Grand Ronde Tribe has consistently argued that not all Native American mascots are derogatory and that some are actually complimentary, and that if Oregon schools included the history of Oregon Tribes in their curriculum that there might not even be a mascot issue to debate.

"I'm hopeful that all schools will move to a more inclusive history," said Summer.

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Salam Noor, who acts as an adviser to the board and sits in on its meetings, said he felt it was important to recognize Oregon's Tribes as sovereign nations.

"We learned a great deal (from the Grand Ronde Tribe). We learned about the history of the Tribes. We learned about the significance of the Tribes and the communities that they live in and the state as a whole," said Noor. "We learned a lot about mascots. We tend to think about mascots in a very narrow and focused way. We learned that these images, these symbols are a form of identity – a representation of identity and they mean a great deal to the Tribes."

Noor said the mascot issue has become a way for Tribes to "engage schools and communities to help them understand the Tribal community, its culture, its history, its identity and its values."

Noor said working through the mascot issue with the Grand Ronde and Siletz Tribes left a tremendous impression on him.

"I carry it with me every day," said Noor. "We have a government-to-government relationship with Tribes and we need to engage them at that level."

Grand Ronde Tribal Council Vice Chairman Jack Giffen Jr. read Tribal Chairman Reyn Leno's written testimony into the record for the board.

"It's an honor and a privilege to be in front of such a high level

decision-making body like this for the future of our youth," said Giffen. "In historical practice, our Elders taught our children and in the modern world we still have that responsibility to make sure that our children are taught in the appropriate way.

"As a sovereign nation, the Tribe has worked hard to build positive government-to-government relationships across all levels of government. We have done so on federal, state and local levels, including our local school districts. We appreciate the State Board of Education's recognition of our sovereignty and for the government-to-government consultation with us.

"The recent changes to the rule before you are supported by the Tribe. If passed, the proposed rule would help the Tribe foster positive relationships with neighboring communities and surrounding school districts. We are committed to working with our local school districts. It is the Tribe's goal to build respect and understanding of the Tribe's history and culture, to give all youth the opportunity to learn the Tribe's curriculum and to foster a culturally respectful representation of Native American symbolism and pride.

"The proposed rule allows for Tribal determinations of when a mascot is culturally significant to the Tribe. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, along with other Oregon Tribes, prefer this solution because it allows schools to keep their Native mascots if they collaborate with a Tribe on positive portrayals of Native symbols and integrate Native studies in school curriculum to combat stereotypes."

Tribal Council member Tonya Gleason-Shepek followed Giffen's testimony.

"I believe there is a commitment to working with the Tribes and I look forward to working with the districts and seeing our history finally taught in the Oregon schools," said Gleason-Shepek. "I just wanted to thank the board for your comments, your concerns that you've expressed, the public comments and concerns, and as we go forward working with the districts we will bring these concerns to the table."

Once the public testimony con-

cluded, the board voted on the proposed resolution and rule.

Board member Jerome Colonna said that although he was conflicted on the issue, it was more important to honor the sovereign status of Tribes and he voted in favor of the resolution.

Summer said she "trusted" the Tribes to make the proper decisions and voted in favor of the proposal as well.

Second Vice Chair Angela Bowen said she felt each member of the board had approached the decision at hand with a good heart and voted no.

Board member Samuel Henry then abstained and Veliz voted no.

Martinez voted in favor of the proposed resolution.

The vote tally was three in favor, two against and one abstention, and four votes were required for passage.

Summer immediately called for a five-minute recess to deliberate and was heard telling Henry as board members left the room that he could not abstain.

After about a 20-minute break, the board reconvened and Henry changed his abstention to a yes vote.

Summer then said the motion passed and "we have adopted the rule of resolution."

Schools that will now have to begin negotiations with their local Tribes if they wish to keep their Native American mascots are:

- Amity High School Warriors
- Banks High School Braves
- Lebanon High School Warriors
- Mohawk High School Indians
- Molalla High School Indians
- North Douglas High School Warriors
- Oakridge High School Warriors
- Philomath High School Warriors
- Reedsport High School Braves
- Rogue River High School Chieftans
- Roseburg High School Indians
- Scappoose High School Indians
- Siletz Valley School Warriors
- Warrenton High School Warriors

Previous, more restrictive incarnations of the Board of Education's mascot exception rule would have only allowed three schools to potentially retain their Native American mascot. ■

Availability of Public Transportation Grant Funds

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde announces the availability of applications for public transportation funding. Projects providing transportation services to Elders and persons with disabilities are eligible and general public transportation projects also are eligible. The Tribe will be selecting up to two projects for competitive applications to the Oregon Department of Transportation for its Special Transportation Fund (STF) Discretionary Grant Program.

Applications for projects serving the Grand Ronde community must be submitted to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde not later than **4 p.m. Monday, Feb. 1, 2016**. For more information, contact Kim Rogers at 503-879-2250, kim.rogers@grandronde.org. The application packet includes instructions and eligibility guidelines. ■

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