

STATE POLITICS

# Mascot law puts school logos to the test

Measure allows challenges to American Indian nicknames

By *Patrick Marley* of the *Journal Sentinel*

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**Madison** — Three dozen Wisconsin schools - including four in the Milwaukee metro area - could have their team names or logos challenged under a bill aimed at curbing the use of American Indian nicknames and mascots.

Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle has said he will soon sign the bill, creating what supporters say would be the first law in the country to bar many race-based mascots and team names in public schools.

The bill would allow residents of a school district to complain to the state Department of Public Instruction if they believed a race-based team name promoted stereotypes. That

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sets up the possibility of challenges to the Menomonee Falls High School Indians, the Mukwonago High School Indians, the Muskego High School Warriors and the Ozaukee High School Warriors.

Mukwonago Principal Dale Henry said his school would fight any challenge.

"I feel we are being very respectful in the use of that logo," he said.

But Barb Munson, chairwoman of the Indian Mascot and Logo Task Force, said she hoped schools change their names and images before they face a formal challenge.

"It is a matter of time before school districts will want to change because they'll realize they're . . . creating racial stereotypes," she said. "I think what this legislation really does is it takes down barriers between racial groups."

In October, Munson's group

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identified 36 Wisconsin schools that use race-based nicknames, including the Rib Lake High School Redmen, the Lancaster High School Flying Arrows and the Tomahawk High School Hatchets.

Rep. Don Friske (R-Merrill), who graduated from Tomahawk High and voted against the bill, said it was ridiculous to consider his alma mater on the list of schools that could face a challenge.

"'Hatchets' is obviously a French word," he said, adding the name has not been controversial in the area.

Munson said the school's problem has more to do with the logo, which is of a pair of stone axes. She said many times schools can address concerns by modifying their images while keeping their names, noting some teams called the Blackhawks have altered their logo from an American Indian to a bird.

Many schools' images are unacceptable because they

are of an American Indian in profile wearing a headdress, she said.

"That is stereotyping to an extreme," she said. "Those are not ambiguous. They may be generalized, but they're not ambiguous."

### **Offended Or Not**

Rep. Bill Kramer (R-Waukesha) said calling Mukwonago High School teams the Indians is "a tribute to the numerous Indian burial sites in the area."

He said he was troubled by the bill because a school may have to change its name when a large number of students and alumni want to keep it.

"The person who's offended could be the only person who's offended," he said.

But Sen. Spencer Coggs (D-Milwaukee), who spent years trying to pass the bill, dismissed Kramer's argument.

"The minority has to be heard," he said. "If it's

offensive to the Native Americans, especially the Native Americans in that area, then they need to be heard."

The bill would create a system to challenge team names, mascots and logos and would require schools to change them if they were found to promote discrimination, student harassment or stereotyping.

Once a resident complained, the state schools superintendent would have to determine whether there was ambiguity about whether the team name, nickname, mascot or logo was race-based. If it were unambiguous, the burden of proving the name was acceptable would be on the school district; if it were ambiguous, the burden would be on the challenger.

The two sides would present their case at a hearing, after which the state superintendent would determine if the name, mascot or logo needed to be

changed. If so directed, a school district would have to make the change within a year, but could get extensions if officials showed it would create a financial burden on the district.

A school could keep its team name if the name was that of a federally recognized tribe and the tribe had consented to use of the name. That provision of the bill was inserted by Rep. Amy Sue Vruwink (D-Milladore) to help the Auburndale High School Apaches in her district keep their name.

But Munson said she believed the school, which publishes an online newsletter called the "Smoke Signal," may have trouble keeping the Apache name if someone complains about it. She said she would expect a lot of scrutiny over whether an Apache tribal council approved the use of the name.

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**About Patrick Marley**

Patrick Marley covers state government and



state politics. He is the author, with Journal Sentinel reporter Jason Stein, of "More Than They Bargained For: Scott Walker, Unions and the Fight for Wisconsin."

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