

THE OPINION PAGE

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OUR OPINION

A chasm of debate on mascot harm

Herald editorial board
 Nickname and mascot debates are nothing new in the northern Red River Valley. Here in Grand Forks, the transition of the UND sports teams from Fighting Sioux to Fighting Hawks came with no little controversy, angst and anger.

It's a saga that now is behind the university – generally speaking, of course. It hasn't stopped fans from shouting "Sioux" at the end of the national anthem and universally referring to "Sioux hockey."

And Grand Forks Central High School's teams for years were the Redskins before changing to the Knights in the early 1990s.

An extensive report in Sunday's Herald noted that a number of schools in the Dakotas and Minnesota still have American Indian-themed mascots and nicknames, including the Chiefs of Iroquois, S.D., the Sioux of Westhope, N.D., and the Indians of Sleepy Eye, Minn. And here's a surprise: The school officials to whom we talked said they aren't hearing complaints about their mascots and nicknames, even as some entities push to cleanse states of what may be considered offensive imagery and words.

At one time in Maine, there were at least 20 schools or colleges that used American Indian-themed names and imagery for their teams. Today, there are none after state lawmakers there passed a law that bars public schools from doing so. In 2016, the South Dakota High School Activities Association approved a resolution that encourages its membership to not use stereotypical American Indian imagery and mascots "that cause harm," but left decisions up to the schools. In 1988, the Minnesota State High School League did the same.

And thus the question: What truly causes harm?

It's a deep chasm of debate. Is it the simple nickname Warriors, which is in use throughout the nation at American Indian and non-Indian schools alike? Or is it the more obscene, such as Redskins or Indians?

We believe the former – Warriors – is not offensive, provided schools are careful not to associate it with American Indian imagery. The same goes for Braves.

Even the Chiefs nickname in Iroquois, S.D., can be considered respectful. The town, after all, is named for the Iroquois people. The same can be said in Mandan.

Arguments on both sides are sure to erupt.

To us, the trouble lies with words like Indians, Redskins and Redmen. Or Midgets, which was in use in McLaughlin, S.D., until 2015 and still is being used in Dickinson, N.D.

Those do more harm than good and should be changed because, as told to us by Anton Treuer of Bemidji State University, they allow opposing fans too much of an opportunity to defile the name no matter how hard a program tries to stay respectful.

"Even if the home team is actually trying to find some respectful way (to use the name), that still doesn't indemnify the experience or protect it from being filled with racism because whoever's playing the Indians are going to say, 'scalp the Indians,'" he said.

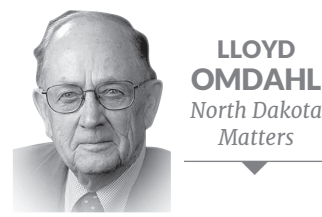
Let's treat everybody like people

The state legislative leadership recently announced that they were going to the people to get suggestions for the use of the interest running into the hundreds of millions generated by our \$6 billion Legacy Fund.

Thus far, the Legislature has no consensus on the definition of "legacy" so we are not sure where the money ought to go. Consequently, they have been using it to fill the fiscal gap at the end of the legislative session. And that will be modus operandi from here to eternity if we don't find a definition. Otherwise we will justiddle the money away.

My first suggestion for the legacy search committee is to fund the new state effort to transform the incarceration of convicts into responsible lives. So far, the effort is so underfunded it is going to collapse in the long run without significant long run funding.

As should have been expected, the primary motivation in the Legislature for embarking on this new venture is reducing the prison population to save money. If anything good happens, they'll take that,



LLOYD OMDAHL
 North Dakota Matters

too.

Last week, I quoted Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem as saying that aside of thinking about the money, helping restore prisoners to society is "the right thing to do."

Wade Enget, state's attorney in Mountrail County, added: "Sometimes you may not hear prosecutors say this, but these are people. These are human beings. And if we want them to be good citizens of our city, our county, our state, then let's start treating them like human beings."

A break of compassion in a cloudy sky.

Human beings need jobs; human beings need housing; human beings need families; human beings need self-respect.

North Dakota is ramping up interest and support for teaching and training the coming generation for the electronic age. Workforce

experts estimate that 40 percent of U. S. jobs are in markets expected to shrink.

So the curriculum for schools will have to be adapted.

But school kids are not the only ones that will need education for the information age. When we talk about workforce development we need to remember that the prisoners to be released will need to be equipped for those jobs as well.

While we are at it, we should also think of those bright people working in menial jobs who could do much better re-equipped for the information age. Otherwise, they will be left for the unemployment line which, over the long run, is more expensive than training programs.

Gov. Doug Burgum has initiated what he calls an "Emerging Digital Academy" that will provide North Dakotans with the kind of training they need to survive in the rapidly changing economy. This program is workforce development that could be applied to paroled prisoners and the underemployed.

North Dakota Commerce Commissioner Michele Kommer noted that "all work is going to become more technical, regardless of the job we are in. That type of technology will also replace some jobs, necessitating the additional skills and training for people that get displaced."

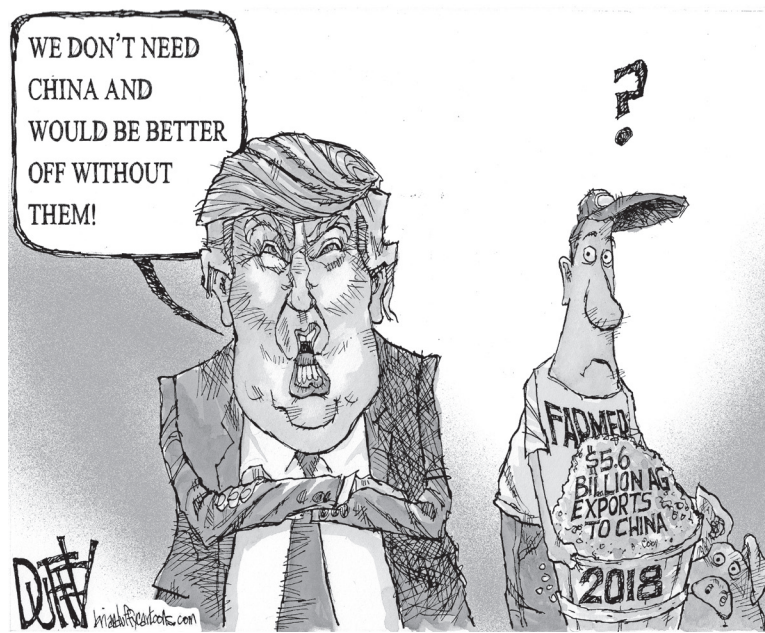
Not only are we underfunded for the programs related to the release of prisoners. Actually, the whole effort to keep up with the world of technology in North Dakota is underfunded and should be given serious consideration for the spending of legacy dollars. Our legacy will be determined by whether or not we keep up with the world.

All of these initiatives have potential for improving the lives of thousands of North Dakotans. In our rush to save money and feed the capitalist machine, however, we should also think of those on the margin who should be brought into the main stream of economic change. A light at the end of their tunnel.

"It's the right thing to do" and "Let's start treating them like human beings."

Lloyd Omdahl is a former professor at UND and state lieutenant governor.

DOUBLE PLAY



OTHER OPINION

DC's NFL team must change with times

The Washington Post
 Since 1929, Teton High School in Driggs, Idaho, has fielded a football team called the Redskins. No more. The school board voted recently to retire the name. The decision comes several months after the school board in Skowhegan, Maine, retired use of "Skowhegan Indians." At one time, there were as many as 20 schools or colleges in Maine that used Native American nicknames and imagery for sports teams. Now, there are none. To make sure there is no backtracking, Maine lawmakers went so far as to enact a law that bars public schools from using Native American names, symbols or images for sports teams.

Washington NFL team owner Daniel Snyder should pay attention to what played out in Idaho

and Maine. The actions underscore the resiliency of the movement to cleanse sport teams of outdated mascots and monikers that cause offense and do real harm. The decisions by these school boards came after years of tense – sometimes painful – debates that, in many respects, mirror the controversy that surrounds Snyder and his team.

Opponents of changing the names cited decades of tradition (note that Idaho's team actually predates the founding and naming of Washington's team) and denied any intent to hurt or defame Native Americans.

In the end, though, officials recognized the need to be on the right side of history – and decency. "My personal opinion, the name Redskins, who gets to decide if that's racist

is the voice of the people that are being called that," Idaho school board member Mary Mello told The Idaho Statesman, pointing to the objections of two of the state's largest tribes, the Shoshone-Bannock and the Nez Perce. "While Indian mascots were often originally chosen to recognize and honor a school's unique connection to Native American communities in Maine, we have heard clearly and unequivocally from Maine tribes that they are a source of pain and anguish," said Maine Gov. Janet Mills, a Democrat, as she signed into law the country's first ban on the use of Native American mascots by public schools and universities.

It really shouldn't take a law to prompt educational institutions – or professional sports teams for that

matter – to recognize that the right thing to do is get rid of these offensive names. Social-science research conducted by the American Psychological Association showed the negative psychological, social and cultural impacts of derogatory Native-themed sports mascots on Native Americans, particularly Native youth. It recommended the immediate end to Native-themed mascots and names.

As more states take action to address this issue and other organizations come to the realization of how indefensible these mascots are (e.g., the Cleveland Indians finally jettisoning that awful Chief Wahoo), Snyder's obduracy makes the Washington team even more of an outlier, and not one the region can be proud of.

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