

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Senate  
228 English Building  
608 South Wright Street  
Urbana, IL 61801-3613

December 14, 2006

Dear Representatives Johnson, McKeon, Davis, and Van Ehlers,

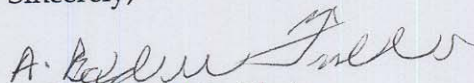
I write to you as the Chairperson of the Equal Opportunity Committee of the Faculty and Student Senate at the University of Illinois, Urbana Campus. The Committee is deeply disturbed by the proposed legislation entitled Protection of University Governance Act of 2006 (HR 5289). This bill limits the NCAA's ability to impose sanctions on member institutions by reason of a team name, symbol, emblem, or mascot.

You may or may not be aware of the fact that the Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana, the official representative body of both faculty and students, has voted to retire the Chief. It has done so in the conviction that using ethnic symbols or mascots for half-time entertainment is inappropriate and damaging to the nature and function of the University. The University brings together people of very different backgrounds in a communicative learning experience. Because these people are deliberately very different in many ways, mutual respect and sensitivity to difference is crucial for this learning to take place. Stereotyping people and using stereotypical images for entertainment is damaging to this educational experience.

I am not just referring to abstract possibilities. Some of our fraternities and sororities have seen fit to throw parties with themes that stereotype minorities. One was "hos and pimps" (stereotyping African Americans), another Tacos and Tequila (in which Latinos and Latinas were stereotyped as overly fertile and undocumented). This has provoked considerable tension and conflict on our campus. The University has rightly levied sanctions against these fraternities and sororities. But the University itself, or I should say the Board of Trustees, refuses to terminate the use of an ethnic stereotype for half-time entertainment. Some might claim that this mascot or symbol is in fact honoring Native Americans, but that is not what they feel when sacred dances and eagle feathers are used for entertainment purposes outside of any Native American context. The University community, the people who live, work, and study here, is trying to send one message about what we are as a University and what we expect of our members, and the Board of Trustees, who do not live and work here, are sending another by maintaining the Chief.

The passage of HR 5289 would be very detrimental to our efforts. We believe that the NCAA has taken the correct position. Therefore, on behalf of the Senate Committee on Equal Opportunity, and in conformity with the vote taken by the full University Senate, I ask you to withdraw HR 5289.

Sincerely,



A. Belden Fields, Chair  
Senate Committee on Equal Opportunity

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