

**Meeting Minutes – Indiana Native American Indian Affairs Commission (INAIAC)  
Civil Rights Subcommittee**

Thursday, May 14, 2015

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm EDT

Via Conference Call

The Civil Rights Subcommittee meeting was called to order at 1:40pm EDT

**Commissioners Present:** Chairman John P. Warren, Chief John Boyd, Dave Liebel

**Staff Present:** Kerry Steiner, Executive Director

**Invocation:** Chief John Boyd

**Agenda Item: Use of R-word in Schools**

Chairman Warren stated he would like to identify the Indiana schools that are using the word “redskin” (hereinafter referred to as “the R-word”) either in their teachings or as mascots. Kerry Steiner stated there is currently a college intern researching on behalf of INAIAC to identify schools that use the R-word as their mascot. A member of the public mentioned such a list exists and it would be shared with INAIAC. Kerry Steiner suggested a member of the Education Subcommittee sit on the Civil Rights Subcommittee or vice versa to create an overlap of information and communication. Chairman Warren stressed the importance of referring to the word as the R-word rather than ever saying it. A member of the public added that the six schools currently using the R-word as mascots are all private schools. Chairman Warren stated the INAIAC can offer their opinion to these schools rather than asking them to change it; he requested that copies of the images be included in the intern’s research.

A member of the public stated that public opinion is that there is a collective movement across the country for changing the use of the R-word and suggested data be collected on Indiana schools that use anything of Native American origin, i.e., Indians, etc. Another member of the public mentioned what Wisconsin is doing with respect to mascots and Chairman Warren asked that we look to see what other states are doing as part of INAIAC’s data collection process. A member of the public stated a college student recently did a college thesis on the topic of how Native Americans identify themselves and Chairman Warren added that Michigan has data on the effects of mascot images on children and he asked whether the INAIAC is entitled to file a civil rights complaint regarding derogatory language. Chief Boyd added that Justice Sandra Day O’Conner stated that if an activity infringes upon the religious practice of another then it’s a violation.

**Agenda Item: Spiritual Ceremony in Correctional Facilities**

The Civil Rights Subcommittee met with 15 men currently residing at the Indiana State Prison (ISP) in Michigan City. The ISP chaplain mentioned the prison recently got approval for CDs. Chairman Warren stated the inmates sang a beautiful song for the Civil Rights Subcommittee members, that he feels the men are hungry for spiritual leadership and that unless prison protocol prevents it, INAIAC will help fill their requests for a sweat lodge, spiritual guidance, books and language materials.

A member of the public asked what the largest Native American population was at ISP in order to know what language materials were being sought, adding that the Choctaw Nation has their language available in books. The ISP chaplain added that CDs are especially helpful. Chairman

Warren is interested in reviewing the cost of bringing these resources to all Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) facilities in the future and suggested the INAIAC look at options such as CDs, DVDs, and hard copy materials. Commissioner Liebel stated that if the INAIAC could create a library list of core books it would be helpful and that large IDOC facilities have the ability to broadcast information via Closed Circuit Television (CCTV); the ISP chaplain added that the ISP has a dedicated channel.

Commissioner Liebel asked the Civil Rights Subcommittee if their visit to ISP was what they expected and Chairman Warren responded that he felt the men were hungry and sincere and spoke from the heart. Commissioner Liebel added that he can arrange for a visit if anyone else is interested in visiting an IDOC facility. Commissioner Warren stated this was the most sincere and loving talking circle he's been in for a long time. A member of the public said that she and another Native American used to visit the men at the federal prison in Terre Haute and felt they were also sincere and added that the biggest challenge is getting a spiritual leader because there is a shortage and they don't always live in close proximity to a facility. Chairman Warren stated the INAIAC will look at how to fund this initiative.

A member of the public suggested that there be two levels of volunteers who visit IDOC facilities: 1) persons who bring information and spend time just talking with the residents, and, 2) spiritual leaders who can conduct ceremony. The same member of the public added that he is currently working with IDOC's Indianapolis Re-entry Education Facility to bring them Cherokee language classes and that he receives about 10 letters a year from inmates requesting spiritual leadership. He also asked the status of the lawsuit regarding the Native service at Miami Correctional Facility. The Circle is again meeting, due to a change in policy. Formerly, offender facilitators had to be approved by and in contact with an outside authority. Due to concerns with another group, all offender led services were closed down until that requirement was met. IDOC has since changed that policy- an outside authority is not required, but we still desperately need guidance from the outside. Volunteers don't need to be spiritual leaders- as a comparison, most Christian services in prison are not led by ordained clergy.

Chairman Warren offered to bring in singers every once in a while and possibly record a song. The ISP chaplain stated it would be helpful to have a person he could email or call for guidance. Chairman Warren added that he was very humbled by the visit. A member of the public stated he does public speaking events on the topic of Native American culture, health and death practices and will share those presentations with INAIAC for their review, adding that the presentations are not tribe-specific, rather, they cover generic subjects such as boarding schools, sterilization, relocation, etc. Chairman Warren asked that if anyone knows of a speaker to please send their name to Kerry Steiner.

Chairman Warren said he would like to see people also come in and sing with the men and pass a feather, and the ISP chaplain added that these meetings could be recorded and shared with other IDOC facilities via the CCTV system. Chairman Warren added that there are a number of Native-made documentaries that could also be shared and Commissioner Liebel reiterated that these could also be shared at all IDOC facilities.

Chairman Warren asked if tribal foods are available to the men at ISP and the ISP chaplain responded that there are two times per year when such feasts are offered: the anniversary of Wounded Knee and the anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and that the men also participate in an annual gift-sharing where gifts are placed on a table and each man gets to select one and that they recently created several craft items for a local non-profit agency. Chairman Warren suggested that going forward these programs be referred to as cultural

competency programs. A member of the public said there a library of old, tribe-specific Native American documentaries from the 1930s and 1940s, available on the Oklahoma University website.

**Agenda Item: Geographical Features that Contain the word ‘squaw’**

Kerry Steiner opened this discussion by saying she had begun to research this topic and has shared her information with one of the college students who is an INAIAC intern. A member of the public asked how many geographical features are in Indiana that use this word, to which Kerry Steiner responded there are seven although one goes by two names, Squaw Creek and Square Creek. She added that according to her initial research the names must appear on the state’s official map to be eligible for change, and that a copy of that map has been provided to the intern. The member of the public then asked if these features were all waterways and Kerry Steiner responded that all of them are with the exception of one that is Squaw Hollow. The Civil Rights Subcommittee collectively agreed that going forward the term “S-word” would be used in lieu of the actual word. A member of the public asked if there were any street names that contained the S-word and it was decided that additional research was warranted.

The Civil Rights Subcommittee meeting adjourned at 2:40pm EDT.

**Additional information:** The following notes outline the meeting conducted with the men at ISP. Although not part of the official Civil Rights Subcommittee meeting, they are relevant to what was discussed during the official meeting.

- Skype could be used as a way to share information and knowledge with those in the IDOC system, to include Elder and ceremony practices.
- One book suggested for the library list was on the Seven Grandfather’s Teachings as outlined in Edward Benton-Banai’s story “*The Mishomis Book*.”