

Bill seeks to teach students about Maine's first settlers

By LISA CHIMELECKI
Staff Writer

Maine tribal facts

- They were the first tribes in the nation to have an organized baseball team and a brass band.
- They helped to forge the Maine border to the St. Croix River.
- They sent the highest percentage of men and women per community to World War I and World War II.
- The last man killed in World War I was a member of the Passamaquoddy Tribe.
- The first Catholic mission in the United States was established for the Passamaquoddy Tribe.

Donald Soctomah, a Passamaquoddy Indian, has been invited to dozens of schools to speak to students about the history of his people.

In most cases, he said, the students' hands go up minutes after he begins talking. They usually bombard him with questions.

"There is a real hunger out there," said Soctomah, a representative for the Passamaquoddy Tribe in the Maine Legislature. "You ought to see the children's eyes when I start talking about our early history."

After speaking with many teachers, Soctomah has come to the conclusion that most Maine students are taught less than 5 percent of their state's history. The instruction usually begins with arrival of the first European colonists in the early 1600s, he said.

But the true story of Maine's his-

tory began 15,000 years ago. A mile-high glacier covered the state, and the thousands of Native Americans who lived on the land survived by hunting caribou and woolly mammoths.

"Most history textbooks relay the stories of Western Indians and

The Indian Wars. They give off this image of native people as being very violent," said Soctomah. "That is not our true history. Our history is much richer."

Soctomah is co-sponsoring a bill that he believes would provide students with a deeper, more accurate depiction of the state's first settlers.

The bill, sponsored by the Penobscot Nation's representative Donna Loring, would require public and private schools to teach children about the history and culture of Maine's Native American tribes, including their tribal governments, territories, economic systems and languages.

True stories

Supporters of the bill have pointed out that people often develop their impressions of different races at an early age. The classroom, they claim, is an ideal place to counteract false stereotypes of Native Americans with true stories about the lives and struggles of Maine Indians.

Before the arrival of European settlers, the state's Native American population reached 25,000 people. The tribal members were skilled hunters and woodcarvers, famous for their design of the birch bark canoe and snowshoes. Every tribe had its own language, its own culture.

But the 18th century was marked with war and disease. At one point, the state's Native American population dwindled to

Today, the state's four tribes – the Penobscot Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Houlton Band of Maliseets and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs – currently have a total of about 4,500 members living on more than 200,000 acres of Indian lands.

Soctomah said he speaks with many people who don't even realize that Maine is home to four active tribes.

"We're hoping this bill sheds some light on Maine's history before and after contact with the explorers and colonists," he said. "I think it is important for children to know the true history of their back yards."

Mixed reaction

The proposed bill has earned the support of Gov. Angus King and the Maine Department of Education. Local educators, however, have mixed feelings.

Mark Simpson, a social studies teacher at Mount Blue Middle School in Farmington, already teaches a section on Native Americans as part of a half-year course on Maine history. He said he would support a measure that would require others to do the same.

Paul Beauparlant, the head of the social studies department at Edward Little High School, likes the notion of teaching the history of Maine's Native American tribes. But he wonders how teachers will find space in their packed curriculums for another state-mandated requirement.

"I think it is a great idea, but you have to look at the logistics of the funding and training," Beauparlant said. "I have to teach Western expansion in seven minutes, the Truman administration in 16. To meet all of the requirements, it is just so hard."

Beauparlant also admitted that he knows very little about the history and culture of Maine's Indians. Finding educational materials on the subject has always been difficult, he said.

Loring's bill aims to solve that problem by setting up a seven-member commission that would develop a curriculum as well as training programs for teachers. Schools would have the option of using these resources or coming up with plans of their own.

A public hearing on the bill was held early this month. It since has been put on hold to allow time for the drafting of a broader bill on the Maine Learning Results. Soctomah said the Legislature plans to consider both bills at the same time to determine if there is a way to combine them.

Native history, culture

By Betsy A. Tannian

Bangor Daily News
April 20, 2001

Last weekend, CNN and the Bangor Daily News featured the Commission on Civil Rights' recommendation for an end to using Indian names as mascots by non-Indian schools, colleges and universities. Although the commission does not carry the weight of the law, Cyd Crue, president of the Illinois chapter of the National Coalition of Racism in Sports and the Media, said, "I think it's going to make a big difference."

Donald Soctomah, Passamaquoddy representative and a co-sponsor of LD 291, stated that "School is the one public institution where all people meet and mix. Researchers agree that children are free from racial bias and easily adjust to one another if brought together in the elementary grades."

How does this connect with LD 291? My answer is they both can make a big difference in honoring and understanding Native Americans and their culture. With this in mind, it is time to start in our education system and begin to make a big difference by replacing false stereotypes of Native Americans that have been grotesquely portrayed as school mascots across the nation with a mascot that does not represent any ethnic group. The next step in making a big difference is through history education in order to present a true picture of the proud Native American who has endured a long history of struggles of assimilation.

There is currently in the Maine Legislature LD 291, An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine's Schools, presented by Donna Loring, Penobscot Nation representative. This legislation would require public and private schools in Maine to provide instruction on tribal governments and political systems, Maine Native American cultures, history, territories, economic systems and languages.

A very informal survey in a Portland doughnut shop revealed 7 out of 10 patrons who were quizzed about the tribes in Maine responded, "there are no Indian tribes in the state." Upon hearing the results of this survey, Loring decided that education had to be a key to understanding between Maine's Native people and the rest of the population.

A key part of this legislation would be a seven-member commission that would include members representing tribal leaders from the four Maine tribes: the Penobscot Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Houlton Band of Maliseets and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. Representation will also come from the education commissioner's office, the State Board of Education and the chancellor of the University of Maine System. This commission would help set standards for curricula and decide on the necessary materials and teacher training.

Although LD 291 is currently being worked on by Rep. Loring and the Department of Education to address a fiscal note on training and materials, it is important that this bill be passed as it is an opportunity in the educational arena that would be a positive step toward ending disrespectful, insensitive and offensive stereotyping of Native Americans.

The United States Commission on Civil Rights said it best on April 13 in their Commission Statement of the Use of Native American Images and Nicknames as Sports Symbols: "The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public education institutions teaches all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse society. Schools have a responsibility to educate their students, they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people."

Native Americans are not the caricatures that we see portrayed as mascots; we are instead a proud people who are still here today despite having endured more than 500 years of cultural genocide and assimilation. Now is the time to begin to honor and respect Native Americans for their ethnic diversity and rich history; the best place to begin is in the elementary and secondary schools of Maine.

Please support LD 291 when it is presented in the Legislature.

Betsy A. Tannian is a Penobscot tribal member and a graduate student at the University of Maine in the Social Work Program.

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Teach Native history

Please offer your heartfelt support for LD 291 — an Act to Require Teaching Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine's Schools. It is centuries late in honoring the contributions of the Indian people. We will benefit greatly from learning more of the true and honest history of Native Americans and their rich culture.

Can you imagine a society where there were no prisons, police, youth detention centers, day care; where children were never yelled at or punished; where the care of children was a sacred trust; and respect for all things was how people lived their lives in harmony with nature?

We all have much to learn from these people. Please write or phone your legislators and Gov. Angus King. Please engage in dialogue with others about this important bill and encourage others to actively support it as well.

Koko Preston
Rockland

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MORNING SENTINEL

Bill requires Indian studies in schools

AUGUSTA (AP) — Leaders of Maine Indian tribes came to the State House to thank legislators Thursday for passing a bill that will require elementary and high schools to teach Native American history.

The Senate enacted the bill Thursday and sent it to Gov. Angus S. King. Donna Loring, who represents the Penobscot Nation in the Legislature, said King has supported the bill all along and is expected to sign it.

The bill includes an Indian studies component in Maine studies, which are already a required part of the school curriculum. Students would be taught about tribal governments, Indian culture and history.

The bill "can go a long way to clarify some of the is-

sues that have caused so much tension" between Indians and non-Indians, Chief Brenda Commander of the Houlton Band of Maliseets said.

Chief Richard Doyle of the Passamaquoddy Tribe said Thursday was "a historic day for the tribes."

The bill does not specify a cost of the new requirement, but says local districts do not have to teach Native American studies immediately if they show the Education Department that they cannot afford the programs.

"We should be able to accomplish this with very little cost to the schools," Loring said.

About 8,000 American Indians live in Maine.

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BRUNSWICK
TIMES RECORD

Bill would require Indian studies in Maine schools

BY GLENN ADAMS
The Associated Press

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Chief Richard Doyle of the Passamaquoddy Tribe said Thursday was "a historic day for the tribes."

The bill will "help us to build understanding so we can go forward as a people, so

the people of Maine will understand us and not be threatened by the things we do," Doyle added.

The bill does not specify a cost of the new requirement, but says local districts do not have to teach Native American studies immediately if they show the Education Department that they cannot afford the programs.

"We should be able to accomplish this with very little cost to the schools," Loring said.

A new commission will be formed to find and recommend educational materials to be used in Maine Indian studies. Loring said she hopes the Maine law will become a national model.

About 8,000 American Indians live in Maine.

The legislation was enacted a year after Maine lawmakers ordered the word "squaw" removed from mountains, waterways and other public sites. Indians consider the word offensive.

Earlier this session, the Legislature voted to remove directional signs bearing the word from the sides of Interstate 95 and the Maine Turnpike.

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File photo

"When people think of Indians, they get an image of Western headdresses and breechcloths. That's not us."

Donna Loring, sponsor, Native American Studies bill

Donna Loring, the Penobscot Nation's tribal representative in the Maine Legislature, attends the start of the current legislative session.

Tribes hope classroom brings belated visibility

● They hope mandated teaching of Indian studies in public schools will raise Mainers' awareness.

By GREGORY KESICH
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Maine's native peoples sometime wonder if they are invisible, said Donna Loring, the Penobscot Nation's tribal representative in the Maine Legislature. Indians have played a key role in Maine's history, have a unique relationship with its government and live in communities throughout the state. But to many residents of European ancestry, it's as if they do not exist. "When people think of Indians, they get an image of Western headdresses and breechcloths. That's not

us," said the three-term state representative from Richmond. "People don't realize what the present-day issues are for native people." That's why Loring sponsored a bill that requires Maine schools to teach children of all backgrounds about Maine's native peoples. The bill was signed into law last week by Gov. Angus King, and changes will start appearing in classrooms next fall. "This will make Maine's Indian people 'real,' show that we do have a history," Loring said. About 8,000 American Indians live in Maine, belonging to several tribes including the Penobscot Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Houlton Band of Maliseets and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. Since the early days of Maine's statehood, the Penobscot Nation and

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Passamaquoddy Tribe have had representatives in the Maine Legislature. They belong to committees and can join in debates but do not vote. Every legislative session, new laws are proposed to add or subtract from the school curriculum, and they are always opposed by the state department of education. This year bills to require entrepreneurial education, sexual abstinence training, and a pilot program for French language instruction for kindergartners were all fought by the department and defeated in the Legislature. But the Native American Studies bill was different, said Judith Lucarelli, the deputy commissioner of education. "This is a special situation."

Lucarelli said, "This is a significant part of our history and culture, and it's something that you can't learn somewhere else. If anybody is going to teach Maine Native studies, it's us." The tragic history of this country's native peoples also makes this subject a special case, she said. "In this state, the interaction of the European settlers and the Native Americans is something that we should look at differently than we look at some other content area," Lucarelli said. The new law calls for the creation of a 15-member commission made up of educators and representatives of Maine's native peoples. The commission will identify appropriate textbooks, activities and other resources for teachers and make them available through a Web site. Teachers will be encouraged to start introducing the material right away into their Maine Studies

curriculum, taught in the fourth grade and in middle school. Over time, the material will be integrated into the state's education standards, known as the Learning Results, in a variety of different disciplines including art and social studies, Lucarelli said. The Maine Indian Tribal State Commission will develop a list of speakers willing to come to classrooms and make presentations. The new requirement is causing some concern among the people who will be asked to teach it. Kenneth Bryant, a social studies teacher at Baker Middle School in Augusta with 31 years of experience, worries that the new lessons will take the place of other important classroom work. "I think that the Legislature is well-intentioned, but I don't know how well they thought this through," Bryant said. "Every time we get a mandate to teach something it erodes

from the time we have to teach something else. ... I'll probably end up watering down what I'm doing" to find room for new material, he said. Loring said the history and culture of Maine's native peoples are not just material for another lesson, but represent an important way their state developed and exists today. For instance, no other state has tribal representatives in their Legislatures, and those members represent tribal governments, not individual constituents like every other member of the Legislature. "There is a unique relationship between tribal governments and the state of Maine that has to be paid attention to," she said. "Nobody knows the history of it — it's unique and it's important."

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MAINE

Bill would mandate Indian studies

The Penobscot Nation's representative says Maine's law is the first of its kind in the United States.

By LISA CHMELECKI
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA - Donna Loring, the state representative for the Penobscot Nation, believes Maine made history this week.

A bill that would require schools to teach students about the culture and ethnic heritage of the state's first settlers passed both houses of the Maine Legislature. It now heads to the desk of Gov. Angus King.

The bill, sponsored by Loring, would require all public and private schools to include a specific component on Maine's Na-

tive American tribes, including their culture, territories and political and economic systems, as part of an already-mandated unit on Maine studies.

L.D. 291 passed in the Maine House of Representatives Wednesday with an "under the hammer" vote, meaning it was approved without any opposition. The Senate did the same Thursday.

If signed by King, Loring said, the bill would make Maine the first state in the nation to mandate Native American studies specific to the tribes and native people of its own state.

'Really historic'

"I'm sitting here thinking that this is really historic," Loring said Thursday after the Senate vote. "No other state has created a policy that requires Native American history in such detail."

Loring and Donald Sootomah, the representative for the Pas-

About the bill

The bill would require schools to teach:

- Maine tribal governments and political systems and their relationship with local, state, national and international governments.
- Maine Native American cultural systems and the experience of Maine tribal people throughout history.
- Maine Native American territories.

samaquoddy Tribe, sponsored the bill in an effort to raise awareness about the history of their people. They believe children often develop their impressions of different races at an early age, making the classroom an ideal place to counteract false stereotypes of Native Americans with true stories about the lives and struggles of Maine Indians.

Before the arrival of European settlers, the state's Native American population reached 25,000 people. Today, the state's

four tribes - the Penobscot Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Houlton Band of Maliseets and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs - have a total of about 4,500 members.

'Far-reaching' bill

Loring said she speaks with many people, including fellow legislators, who don't even realize that Maine is home to these active tribes.

"We may not see the results of this bill until 10 years down the road," she added. "But I know

that this is a far-reaching bill. Every child that goes through school in Maine will now know about Maine's tribes. It's amazing that no other state has done this."

The bill gives schools until 2004-2005 to implement the requirement.

Although many educators and administrators have supported the bill, some expressed concerns about finding room in their already packed schedules for another state mandate. They also worried about finding books and resources on the subject.

The bill seeks to address this problem by setting up a 15-member commission to develop a curriculum, gather and distribute free resources, organize training programs for teachers and apply for grant money for such things as a Web site.

The panel, which would be funded by the tribes, the Maine Indian Tribal State Commis-

sion, the Department of Education and the University of Maine, would have until Sept. 1, 2003, to submit a final report to the state Department of Education.

Schools then would have the option of using its recommended resources or coming up with plans of their own.

"There is no reason why a school shouldn't be able to do this," Loring said, explaining that the commission will be doing all of the groundwork and providing teachers with everything they need to meet the criteria.

If, however, schools are unable to meet the mandate without additional local revenues, the bill gives them the option of presenting their case to the Department of Education. The state then would be responsible for helping them make it happen, Loring said.

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EDITORIAL

Curriculum should include teaching about Maine tribes What's taught, however, is a local decision..

Maine students from Eastport to Fryeburg ought to learn about the state's American Indian tribes.

They should learn not only about the people who were living here long before the European settlers arrived, but also about Maine's current Native American residents -- their cultures, their political systems, ideals and their languages.

While we support the educational goals behind a proposal requiring schools to teach these topics, we believe that a bill currently before the Legislature would violate the control local boards have over their schools. If adopted, the plan would create a seven-member commission to set standards and choose the necessary course materials and teacher training.

We believe that only locally elected officials, directly responsible to the voters, should determine the content of classes taught in schools. Furthermore, mandating a statewide curriculum would obligate lawmakers to reimburse local systems for the cost of its implementation.

There are, however, two things the state can do to ensure that no Maine student graduates from high school without learning about the state's American Indian tribes.

First, it should include knowledge of Maine's indigenous peoples among its Learning Results objectives. Second, the state can also play a role by working with tribal leaders to develop excellent curricular materials that school systems would be eager to adopt voluntarily.

Telling local educators exactly what to teach in their classrooms, however, is treading down a very dangerous path.

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