

“FIGHTING SIOUX” NO LONGER A NICKNAME

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North Dakota's flagship university dropped its contentious Fighting Sioux nickname for the third time Thursday, and officials expressed hope that the latest retirement — fueled by this week's overwhelming statewide vote — would finally stick.

The move became official when the state Board of Higher Education voted to get rid of the University of North Dakota's moniker and Indian head logo, which had sparked lawsuits and threats of NCAA sanctions.

Residents cast ballots Tuesday in numbers not seen in a primary election for more than five decades, and more than two-thirds favored putting the decades-old dispute to rest by dumping the name.

"It is time to move forward, and I think the voters, the citizens of North Dakota, gave us that permission," UND President Robert Kelley said Thursday. "It's my goal now to bring everyone back into the house."



While the move immediately retires the moniker used by UND athletic teams for more than 80 years, advocates for keeping it are

circulating petitions to force another vote this November that would mandate the nickname under the state's constitution.

The nickname and American

Indian head logo were first jettisoned in December 2010, after nickname supporters failed to meet an NCAA settlement agreement requiring approval from the state's two namesake Sioux tribes. The school was given until Aug. 15, 2011, to stop using the moniker.

The name was un-retired the first time in March 2011 after state lawmakers passed a bill requiring UND to use the logo. Legislative leaders passed out T-shirts that read "Fighting Sioux: It's the law" and marched to Indianapolis to convince the NCAA to back off on threats of sanctions.

The law was repealed during a special session in November 2011 and the school, for the second time, began working on transition details, such as preserving logo history and renaming clubs, awards and scholarships. That was put on hold in February after a group of nickname supporters turned in petitions to put the issue to a vote.

"We started down this path before," Kelley said. "We will return to where we were and determine how to best move ahead."

Sean Johnson, spokesman for the committee that led the ballot measure, said earlier this week the issue is not dead. The Spirit Lake Committee for Understanding and Respect will continue to work on a possible constitutional amendment to save the nickname, Johnson said.

Grant Shaft, the board president, is hoping the group will "reflect further" on that idea following Tuesday's results. "Any direction you look at the issue, whether a county by county, precinct by precinct or statewide breakdown, or any other demographic, it appears the folks in North Dakota want to allow the University of North Dakota to move forward," he said.

The school won't move forward with a new nickname. While sacking the original bill lawmakers attached a provision that prevents UND from taking a new nickname until 2015, to promote a cooling-off period.

Shaft compared the issue to a high school nickname debate in Grand Forks, his hometown, where Central High School dropped its Redskins logo. People on both sides of that imbroglio "ultimately healed," he said.

"I think this healing process might be quicker than we think with UND simply because the people have been dealing with it for a long time and have had the opportunity to move on to some degree," Shaft said.



The new North Dakota hockey jerseys have no nickname and no mascot to comply with NCAA rules.