

For Immediate Release
March 2, 2016

Paiute Tribal Council Responds to Cedar High School Drill Team's Dance Routine

The Tribal Council of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah is disappointed by a dance routine that the Cedar High School Mohey Tawa drill team has been performing. A number of tribal members, including families whose children attend Cedar High School, have been disturbed by what they see as cultural insensitivity by the drill team. As a result of the reaction by tribal members, the Cedar High School principal, John Dodds, has assured the Tribal Council that the dance routine will not be performed in any future competitions. The Tribal Council supports the decision of the Cedar High School to not allow the routine to be performed again.

Tribal Chairwoman Corrina Bow stated, "The dance routine imitates the fancy shawl dance which is known as the 'Butterfly Dance' or 'Graceful Shawl Dance.' This dance is typically danced by young Native women from many tribes during powwows or gatherings. The performance by the drill team showed no comprehension of this dance style. The way it was performed, with the dancers wearing wigs, holding fans and making dramatic movements, such as legs raised high in the air and bending over, misrepresented the beauty and graceful style of actual fancy shawl dancers. I can empathize with tribal youth students and their parents who found this to be offensive."

Janene McCurdy, head coach, and other representatives of the Mohey Tawa drill team met with the Tribal Council in April 2015. They told the Tribal Council that they were interested in developing a routine, potentially for competition, that incorporated Native American culture.

At the time, members of the Tribal Council expressed deep concern, and specifically disapproved of using headdresses, eagle feathers, face paint or wigs because they would be seen as offensive. The Tribal Council recommended that the drill team communicate with the Paiute Indian Tribe's Cultural Resources Director. The Tribal Council asked to preview any routine before it was performed in public. Unfortunately, the drill team did not follow up on any of the Tribal Council's recommendations.

"There was a tremendous missed opportunity for the drill team, its coaches and the Tribe when an idea had no follow up to developing a routine that would celebrate the relationship between Cedar High School and the Paiute Indian Tribe, or honor the dancing style of our fancy shawl dancers," said Chairwoman Bow.

"Now we must find peace within ourselves, knowing that the routine will not be performed again, and knowing that our communities must take a unified stand for the wellbeing of all the students at Cedar High," she continued.

"The students' dignity and respect of their traditions and culture is important and we must handle this matter with great sensitivity," said Chairwoman Bow. "As Natives we live in two worlds, one with our traditions, culture and beliefs that we hold sacred, and the other modern in society."

"This was unfortunate it happened but we must not let this hold us back in moving forward and demonstrating how we can come together – the Tribe and the school – and learn from this lesson," urged Chairwoman Bow.