



The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

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April 24, 2013

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Harte Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20005

RE: Indian Mascots

Dear Chairwoman Cantwell:

On behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT), I wanted to congratulate you on becoming the Chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. As you know, the Committee has a rich history in advocating for the interests of Indians and Indian tribes. The CCT looks forward to your tenure at the helm of the Committee and stands ready to assist in any way we can in moving the Committee's agenda.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly discuss the CCT's views on Indian mascots. With the recent developments in the litigation involving the challenge to the Washington Redskins trademark and the introduction of H.R. 1278, the *Non-Disparagement of American Indians in Trademark Registrations Act of 2013*, this issue has been receiving significant media attention.

Many Americans do not know and have never met an American Indian. For this reason, depictions of "Indians" in the media and, in more specifically, during sporting events, are often the only representations that they see or know. This makes the Washington Redskins team name and its unofficial mascot, Chief Zee, all the more troubling. The name "Redskin" is offensive not only because it is a racial descriptor but also because its usage correlates to a period in U.S. history when Indians were killed and forcibly removed from their homelands.

The caricature of Indians personified by "Chief Zee" at Redskin games – with his faux headdress and tomahawk – is perhaps the worst outgrowth of the team name. Washington Redskins football games are perhaps the last place in the U.S. where such a spectacle is not only tolerated, but embraced.

It is noteworthy that in an October 7, 2012 article ("Fifty Years Ago, Last Outpost of Segregation in N.F.L. Fell"), the *New York Times* chronicled how the Washington Redskins was the last NFL team to integrate its players in 1962. Then-Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall played a key role by insisting that the team integrate prior to using the federally funded D.C. Stadium (since renamed RFK Stadium), which led to the change. With schools, colleges, and even the NCAA updating their mascots and policies during the past decade, the Washington Redskins organization and its owner, Daniel Snyder, have yet to even discuss the issue in public.

For these reasons, the CCT encourages the Committee to examine the Indian mascot issue generally and the Washington Redskins in particular through an oversight hearing or the facilitation of dialogue. The legal and legislative developments related to the team name provide an ample opening to shine public light on this issue. The CCT appreciates your consideration of this letter and we look forward to providing further input on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Sirois". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "S".

John Sirois
CHAIRMAN