



Change the Mascot!

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Joel Barkin
Oneida Nation V.P. for Communications
(315) 361-8173
jbarkin@oneida-nation.org

Change the Mascot Leaders Call on NFL Players Association Executive Director Candidates to Stand Against D.C. Team's R-Word Mascot

Oneida Nation Homelands (March 10, 2015) With elections coming soon for the position of Executive Director of the NFL Player Association (NFLPA), Change the Mascot campaign leaders have issued a letter to all of the candidates urging them to take a stand against the racist name of the Washington NFL team. The letter, issued by the National Congress of American Indians, the United South and Eastern Tribes, and the Oneida Indian Nation, cites current Executive Director DeMaurice Smith's recent comments opposing the name. It also encourages the candidates to make public statements on the subject and to pledge to put forward a resolution to NFLPA members proposing that the organization join the Change the Mascot campaign and demand that the league change the name.

The letter notes how sports, and particularly beloved athletes, have unique power in shaping today's culture. Correspondingly, it calls upon the future NFLPA Executive Director to use his position by being an importance voice for equality.

"Athletes are in a unique position to take up the cause of social justice - especially on an issue like this that is so intertwined with professional sports. In the spirit of solidarity that the NFLPA so often promotes, we hope you will stand with us in this critical campaign," states the letter.

The letter also cites how continued use of the R-word name is an affront for current NFL players on both a moral level by forcing them to wear and promote the iconography of the slur, and on an economical level by potentially reducing revenues.

The Change the Mascot letter was sent to Executive Director DeMaurice Smith who is running for re-election, as well as other candidates Jim Acho, Jason Belser, Sean Gilbert, Robert Griffith, Rob London, Arthur McAfee, Andrew Smith and John Stufflebeam.

The election for NFLPA Executive Director is scheduled for March 15.

Change the Mascot is a grassroots campaign that works to educate the public about the damaging effects on Native Americans arising from the continued use of the R-word. This civil and human rights movement has helped reshape the debate surrounding the Washington team's name and brought the issue to the forefront of social consciousness. Since its launch last season, Change the Mascot has garnered support from a diverse coalition of prominent advocates including elected officials from both parties, Native American tribes, sports icons, leading journalists and news publications, civil and human rights organizations and religious leaders.

The full text of the letter to the candidates is included below and can be found on the Change the Mascot website [here](#).



March 9, 2015

NFL Players Association
1133 20th St. NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear NFLPA Executive Director Candidate,

From Jesse Owens to Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali, athletes hold a special leadership position in history's crusades for social justice. That has never been truer than it is today: as sports have become such

an integral part of American culture, athletes have unique power to shape that culture for the better and to be a voice for the cause of equality.

The National Football League Players Association has been one of the organizations that has consistently marshaled that power for this righteous cause, standing in solidarity with others, just as civil rights groups have stood with the union. Because you are a candidate to become the next executive director of this hallowed organization, we are writing to you with a critical request: we are asking that you pledge that, if elected, you will put a resolution forward to NFLPA members allowing them to vote to have the organization formally join our Change the Mascot Campaign.

Our campaign's goal is simple: we want the NFL to use its power to finally stop the Washington franchise from promoting a dictionary-defined racial slur as its name. This is a word screamed at Native Americans as they were dragged at gunpoint off their lands -- and it was a name originally given to the team by one of America's most infamous segregationists, George Preston Marshall. As public health organizations have attested, this name has significant negative effects on Native Americans: every Sunday, the promotion of this name tells millions of Americans it is acceptable to denigrate native peoples on the basis of their alleged skin color.

Just as the NFL would never dare allow any other racial slur to brand one of its teams, it should not allow this name to continue to be promoted for the team that represents the nation's capital. That is a common sense view understood by current professional football players including Richard Sherman and Champ Bailey; by former stars such as Terry Bradshaw, Calvin Hill and Mark Schlereth; and by the Fritz Pollard Alliance, the organization that works with the league to promote civil rights. They have all spoken out against the continued use of the team's current name, as have major Native American organizations, public health organizations, religious leaders, sports media icons, governors, Members of Congress from both parties and the President of the United States.

For current NFL players, this name is an affront on two levels.

Morally, it is unacceptable for the league to continue forcing athletes to wear uniforms that publicly promote the iconography of a racial slur.

Economically, the continued use of the name potentially reduces revenues for players. According to an Emory University study of college teams, "The shift away from a Native American mascot yields positive financial returns." With the NFLPA generating some of its revenues through merchandise sales, continuing to use the Washington team's name forsakes the same positive financial returns that players could reap if the name were changed.

Last year, the current NFLPA executive director DeMaurice Smith issued a statement to The Washington Post correctly noting that the Washington team's name conveys "racial insensitivity" and declared that "I do not believe anyone should inflict pain, embarrass or insult, especially given the racial insensitivity" of the team's name.

We applaud Mr. Smith for making such a bold statement, and we are asking that all current candidates for NFLPA executive director make similar public statements. But we are also asking that the candidates take it a step further by pledging to have the full membership of the NFLPA vote on a formal resolution to join the Change the Mascot campaign and to demand that the league change the team's name.

As noted at the beginning of this letter, athletes are in a unique position to take up the cause of social justice - especially on an issue like this that is so intertwined with professional sports. In the spirit of solidarity that the NFLPA so often promotes, we hope you will stand with us in this critical campaign.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Halbritter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Ray Halbritter
Oneida Indian Nation Representative

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqueline Johnson Pata". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director, National Congress of American Indians

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Patterson". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Brian Patterson
President, United South and Eastern Tribes
Bear Clan Council Member, Oneida Indian Nation