



Change the Mascot!

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

Brett Stagnitti
Oneida Nation Public Affairs Manager
(315) 829-8310
bstagnitti@oneida-nation.org

Change the Mascot Campaign Releases Statement in Response to BuzzFeed Article

ONEIDA NATION HOMELANDS (NY) (July 2, 2014) BuzzFeed on July 1 published an article titled “The Weirdest Conceivable Twist in the Fight Over Washington’s NFL Team Name.” The piece pointed out that the team recently hired a blogger who “convinced America ‘macaca’ was racist. Now he’s in charge of convincing America ‘Redskins’ isn’t.”

In response to the BuzzFeed article, Change the Mascot campaign today released the following statement:

“Ben Tribbett was right to criticize George Allen for using a racial epithet against people of color, so it is surprising that Mr. Tribbett is now a paid operative working with George Allen and his brother Bruce to actively promote a racial epithet against people of color. Mr. Tribbett needs to explain why he thinks it is unacceptable to slur Indian Americans but that it is somehow acceptable to similarly slur Native Americans. Maybe he's had a change of heart and now thinks denigrating people on the basis of their skin color is OK, or perhaps he was fine selling his principles to the highest bidder. In this case, Dan Snyder has repeatedly proven that he is the

highest bidder of them all when it comes to his desire to continue profiting off of the slander of Native Americans.”

BuzzFeed quoted team spokesman Ben Tribbett as saying that critics of the racial slur “are only a small number of ‘well-intentioned’ elites ‘who are not Native American.’” In response, the Change the Mascot campaign said:

“The major organizations representing tens of thousands of Native Americans have been leading this campaign, meaning that Mr. Tribbett’s comments represent yet another attempt to dehumanize Native Americans by pretending that we do not exist. As evidenced by his dishonest comment, Mr. Tribbett aims to portray people of color as silent cartoon characters whose only role in society is to serve as a mascot for their favored sports teams. That’s why the Change the Mascot campaign is such an important civil rights initiative: this is fundamentally about telling people like Mr. Tribbett, George and Bruce Allen and Dan Snyder that Native Americans do not deserve to be treated to continued denigration - we deserve to be treated with basic respect. That starts with treating us as human beings, acknowledging our objections and not pretending we are silent.”

Below is the full text of the BuzzFeed article, which can also be viewed here:

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/evanmcsan/redskins>

The Weirdest Conceivable Twist In The Fight Over Washington’s NFL Team Name

Eight years ago, one of Virginia’s most prominent liberal bloggers convinced America “macaca” was racist. Now he’s in charge of convincing America “Redskins” isn’t.

by Evan McMorris-Santoro
BuzzFeed Staff

WASHINGTON — Last week, the Washington Redskins hired an unusual defender for the team’s beleaguered name: the man who famously sunk George Allen’s political career with a video of the Republican senator using the word “macaca.”

Ben Tribbett, a blogger who first found and then promoted the video of Allen calling a Virginia man “macaca,” [joined the front office](#) of the Washington Redskins and owner Dan Snyder’s [team of consultants and paid staff](#) who are defending the NFL franchise’s name.

The effort also brings Tribbett on the same team as Allen whose brother, Bruce, is the Redskins’ general manager. Tribbett won’t talk about Allen or what exactly he plans to do to defend the Redskins’ name, but he argues his new job is consistent with his long-held belief that the name “Redskins” is neither racist nor divisive.

The critics are only a small number of “well-intentioned” elites, Tribbett told BuzzFeed, “who are not Native American, by the way.” On D.C. sports radio Monday, Tribbett dismissed the concerns over the team’s nickname as [“a PC campaign.”](#)

“It’s something that’s been around in our lexicon for, you know, 70 years, and it’s primarily as a football

thing,” Tribbett told BuzzFeed. “The only people who get called Redskins are football players.”

Tribbett is dismissive of those who say “Redskins” has any racially charged negative connotation.

“They don’t have the support behind it,” he said. “That’s why they’re resorting to these tactics of comparing it to the N-word or things like that that are horrible. Because they’re not winning the debate. They’re not winning over the public with this.”

Football for many Northern Virginians like Tribbett runs very, very deep and the Redskins may be the only thing besides traffic that unites the three parts — Maryland, Virginia, and Washington — of the D.C. area. The team’s regional fan base remains united behind the embattled nickname, Tribbett insists, and said the pressure to change it smacks of outside interference in matters that should be local.

But many progressives in Virginia who followed Tribbett for years are “appalled,” one prominent liberal voice in the commonwealth told BuzzFeed.

“You’ve got overlapping priorities,” in Virginia, said Catherine Read, Northern Virginia-based progressive political fixture and an Equality Virginia board member who thinks the nickname is racist. “It’s a religion for some people here.”

“I don’t think Ben is coming at this from political correctness,” she added. “He’s coming at it as a fan.”

“Maybe he’s playing 3-D chess, like in Star Trek,” one prominent liberal said, wondering aloud how the man who surfaced “macaca” can square his new gig with his past. “Or maybe he’s full of shit.”

In August 2006, as detailed extensively in the book [Netroots Rising](#), Tribbett got what would be the first ever major “tracker video.” Then an anonymous blogger writing under the name Not Larry Sabato — a crack at the [political prognosticator](#) based at the University Of Virginia — Tribbett called up the campaign staff of Allen’s Democratic challenger, Jim Webb, and told them he knew they had a recording of Allen mocking a Democratic staffer dispatched to follow Allen on the campaign trail. On [the tape](#), Allen pointed to the Democrat, an American of Indian descent named [S.R. Sidarth](#), called him “macaca” and added, “Welcome to America.”

In the aftermath of Webb’s defeat of Allen, “tracker” became a term of art, and a necessary hire for any candidate. In a sense, every opposition researcher everywhere hopes to be the one to shop the next “macaca.” It’s a moment that’s often imitated but rarely recreated.

Another and, just as key, legacy of the “macaca” scandal was the requisite argument about a gaffe’s intent that goes with any similar political scandal these days. No one had really heard the word before, and after Allen said it there was a lively debate about [whether or not](#) the word was racist or even an insult. [Allen](#) and his allies first said it was a nonsense word, made up by the Republican, and the first AP stories said it was a term for monkey. Even Tribbett didn’t know what it was, spelling it “makkhah” in his first post. Eventually, Allen’s critics found the word “macaca” used as a slur against dark-skinned people in Francophone northern Africa, tied that to the years Allen’s mother lived in Tunisia, and eventually proclaimed that he must have heard it from her (she [denied](#) the charge). Years after the election, Allen [apologized](#) for “macaca,” saying he “singled out” Sidarth by “calling him a name.”

One of the loudest voices [insisting](#) the controversial term “macaca” was a racist attack: Tribbett.

“I’ve been arguing for two weeks on here that Macaca is a racial slur,” he [wrote](#) in an Aug. 27, 2006 post about a Democratic candidate who he heard “made an offensive joke to a group of Muslims.”

“Racial slurs are not funny things to joke about,” he added.

Tribbett shut down Not Larry Sabato not long after taking the job with the NFL team. [Archived pages](#) show he was dismissive of those who thought Allen’s crack was anything other than racially charged.

But Tribbett has been a staunch advocate of the Redskins name for a long time, leading to [vigorous debate](#) with followers. Tribbett says strange bedfellows are par for the course.

“There’s all sorts of political issues all the time where there are people of different political views who are on the same side of a political issue,” he said. “Weird? No, I’ve been on the same side of probably everyone in Virginia politics at some point on some issue.”

In an interview, he kept pointing to a belief that average Americans aren’t offended by the name and want to keep it, while a cadre of elitists bent on scoring a victory for political correctness based in ignorance want to destroy it. He used the widely derided “#RedskinsPride” [campaign](#) to illustrate the point. While on Twitter, the hashtag was quickly hijacked by opponents of the name, on Facebook, the hashtag was [a rousing success](#) for the franchise. Tribbett chalked up the difference to regular fans on Facebook against the more elitist anti-team name crowd on Twitter.

“I’m very confident that when people get all the facts behind this, they’ll support the Redskins. The vast majority,” he said. “The big fact is the history of the team, and we’ll go out and talk about this more as the [campaign] goes on.... We’re going to bring out a full history of the team, the meaning of the word ‘Redskins,’ what people perceive it is.”

Tribbett is more than comfortable going from the man who made “macaca” a thing to the man trying to make sure “Redskins” isn’t. But the Democrats who joined him in the political trenches in 2006 are scratching their heads.

“It’s just sad that someone with a such long tradition of supporting Virginia Democrats and progressive causes can turn around and become a part of the Dan Snyder and Allen family regime to defend a racist team name,” said a Democratic veteran of Virginia politics and commonwealth native now working on the national stage. “What does he really believe in?”

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