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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6450

MARY J. PAVEL, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
DAVID A. MULLON JR., MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

February 10, 2014

Roger Goodell  
Commissioner  
National Football League  
345 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10154

Dear Commissioner Goodell:

We are writing to express our disappointment with the National Football League's stance on the name of the Washington football team. We also wish to register our objections to your pre-Super Bowl press conference on January 31, 2014, at which you defended the Washington team name as an "honor" to Native Americans. It is, in fact, an insult to Native Americans. We are calling on you and the National Football League to take a formal position in support of a name change.

You have met with leaders of the National Congress of American Indians, an organization that represents more than 250 tribes and millions of Native Americans. They aggressively support a name change as they find the Washington football name to be racially offensive. (<http://www.ncai.org/resources/resolutions/commending-efforts-to-eliminate-racist-stereotypes-in-sports-and-calling-on-the-u-s-president-and-congress-to-combat-these-continuing-affronts-to-native-peoples>).

For you to pretend that the name is defensible based on decade-old public opinion polling flies in the face of our constitutionally protected government-to-government relationship with tribes.

The National Congress of American Indians represents tribal governments that fulfill the government-to-government relationship with the United States government. This relationship is protected in our Constitution. Saying the Washington football team "honored Native Americans" perpetuates a charade that dishonors Native people and their governments and erodes the reputation of the National Football League. We believe that the fact that this term does not honor – but rather disparages – Indian people and tribes is what will and should guide federal policymakers.

The terminology used by the Washington football team has been determined to be a slur. On December 29, 2013, the Patent and Trademark Office, the agency charged with determining whether a word is a slur and can be protected in commerce, determined that this term is a “derogatory slang” term that refers to and is considered offensive to American Indians in a case of a business venture seeking to trademark the term.

In 1999, the Patent and Trademark Office refused to register the Washington football team’s trademark because the agency found the term disparaged Indian people. Neither the league nor the team should take comfort behind a technicality that prevented the agency’s decision from being enforced. The Patent and Trademark Office is soon to act on a new case directly tied to the team’s trademark, brought by several young Indian people.

The National Football League can no longer ignore this and perpetuate the use of this name as anything but what it is: a racial slur. It is clear that you haven’t heard the leading voices of this country – and not just Indian Country. Virtually every major civil rights organization in America has spoken out in opposition to this name including the NAACP, the Anti-Defamation League, the Rainbow Coalition and the League of United Latin American Citizens.

The National Football League is on the wrong side of history. It is not appropriate for this multibillion dollar 501(c)(6) tax-exempt organization to perpetuate and profit from the continued degradation of tribes and Indian people. It is time for the National Football League to formally support and push for a name change for the Washington football team.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Tom Cole  
Member of Congress