



# NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

June 3, 2003

Anders Gyllenhaal, Editor  
The Minneapolis Star Tribune  
425 Portland Avenue  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55488

Dear Mr. Gyllenhaal:

On behalf of the member tribes of the National Congress of American Indians, I write to express our strong concerns regarding the Star Tribune's potential change to its editorial policy on American Indian mascots and team names. The Star Tribune is one of the true pioneers in upholding substantive respect for American Indians in print. The decision the Star Tribune made nearly ten years ago to ban offensive images and nicknames was remarkably progressive in recognizing the civil rights of Native Americans. It stood—and still stands—as a powerful and courageous condemnation of bigotry. NCAI is disappointed to hear that you are considering dropping the ban on defamatory names and images, and we urge you to rethink the changes and retain your current policy—a policy that recognizes the dignity of First Americans.

You noted that this potential policy change is an effort to pursue direct, straight-forward, and accurate reporting. We do not think the current ban on racist names and logos jeopardizes that pursuit. While it may be more convenient to describe the Washington football team as the “Redskins,” it also conveys troubling legitimacy to such a slur. While we realize the need for direct and accurate reporting—our community has fallen victim to reporters who have not heralded these virtues—we also recognize the importance of eradicating racism and bigotry, particularly from the media, where its use speeds and reinforces social acceptance of injurious words and images. It is for this reason that we ask you to maintain your editorial policy against the use of racist mascots and team names.

We would like to commend you for bringing these potential changes and the reasons for them to tribal leaders. Such dialogue is crucial to developing better understanding between tribes and media entities. Building on this understating, we want you to know your refusal to publish demeaning images and names helps maintain the civil rights of American Indians. The Star Tribune's early step to ban racist language nine years ago has opened the door for others to denounce mascots and team names, including the Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star, the Native American Journalists Association, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights. We believe that lifting the ban on terms and images derogatory to American Indians would be a step backward for the Star Tribune. We ask you to keep your policy in place, and continue to foster respectful relationships with tribal leaders in Minnesota and across the nation.

Sincerely,



Tex Hall

President, National Congress of American Indians

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