

COUNCIL ANNETTE ISLANDS RESERVE

METLAKATLA INDIAN COMMUNITY

ALBERT G. SMITH, MAYOR
JUDITH A. EATON, EXECUTIVE TRIBAL SECRETARY
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Ms. Melissa Johnson
Interim Superintendent
Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District
333 Schoenbar Road
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901
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February 9, 2022

Re: Racist Incident at Ketchikan High School Boys Basketball Game on February 5, 2022

Dear Superintendent Johnson,

I am shocked and angered that today, in 2022, I am forced to write this letter of condemnation due to a racist incident that occurred during the basketball game between the Metlakatla High School Chiefs and the Ketchikan High School Kings on Saturday February 5, 2022, at the Ketchikan High School. It is despicable that students and faculty of Ketchikan High School thought it would be a good idea to promote a "Cowboys and Indians Pep Theme" during a basketball game in which the Metlakatla team was playing. We are the only team in the entire state of Alaska who comes from a federal Indian reservation and we take great pride in our heritage.

Also shocking was the initial response to this incident, which was remarkably muted, downplaying it as an act merely of "cultural insensitivity." While it is at least that, it is also much more. There is a broader historical context, one of white supremacy, genocide and trauma, that permeates the white-privileged blindness that allowed the cowboys-and-Indians pep theme to form, let alone grow into a school-sanctioned production at the recent basketball game. It was not funny, nor cute, nor anywhere close to appropriate.

No, it was hurtful and emotionally violent. It reinforced the reality of white supremacy by totally (and so easily) ignoring the perspective of my and all Native people. That is why the Metlakatla Indian Community demands a strong response, equal to the harm it inflicted on us. A simple apology will not do, although we deserve that too. We demand a thorough investigation into how this pep theme came to be, who supported it, and appropriately strong disciplinary action to ensure that something similar never happens again.

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised. Only 77 years ago, within just one lifetime, signs in the windows of Ketchikan storefronts read, "NO DOGS OR NATIVES ALLOWED." Many of our parents, who themselves played for the Chiefs, still recall the mistreatment and marginalization they received during basketball trips to Ketchikan High School. But as a life-long resident of Metlakatla, a former councilman and now Mayor, who had worked and continues to work to strengthen our community's relationship with Ketchikan, I thought we had moved beyond those divides, or had at least been closing the gap.

I hope that this incident proves to be an aberration, rather than a revelation of racism still lurking beneath the surface. To that end, I call on all women and men of good conscience within the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District to take strong action against those who perpetrated this incident, as

well as those who failed to stop it, and put in place measures to ensure that something similar never happens again. By doing so, you will help to restore my faith that there is a future where Metlakatla and Ketchikan can grow closer, support each other and move toward a better future where racism is truly a thing of the past.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Albert Smith', written in a cursive style.

Albert Smith, Mayor
The Metlakatla Indian Community