

NCAI commends decision by MLB's Cleveland franchise to change its 'Indians' name

WASHINGTON – The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) commends today's (Dec. 14, 2020) announcement by the Major League Baseball (MLB) franchise in Cleveland to retire its "Indians" name and mascot, which the team has used for more than a century.

Cleveland arrived at this landmark decision following an extensive, multi-faceted process to engage with and learn from Tribal nations, leaders, scholars, local and national Native organizations, and Native people from all walks of life about how the team's name impacts them.

"Today's announcement represents a monumental step forward in Indian Country's decades-long effort to educate America about what respect for Tribal nations, cultures and communities entails,

and how sports mascots like the 'Indians' prevent our fellow Americans from understanding and valuing who Native people are today, what makes us unique and the many contributions we make to this country," said NCAI President Fawn Sharp. "The genuine commitment the team has made to listen to and learn from Indian Country over the past several months is to be applauded and the process the team used should serve as a blueprint for sports teams and schools across the nation as this movement for racial justice and inclusion continues to grow."

"This decision and the team's ensuing transition to a new name offer us an unprecedented teaching moment, as our work is far from done. We must continue

to teach all who will listen the fact that Native people are still here, that we belong to sovereign Tribal nations and that a racially just society must center and celebrate Native people, welcome our perspectives and value the rich cultural diversity we bring to America's table," said Dr. Aaron Payment, NCAI first vice president. "It also presents an opportunity to honor the toil and sacrifice of those who have fought for so long to enable us to reach this moment, individuals such as Clyde Warrior, Suzan Harjo, Lynda Clause, Faye Brings Them, Ray Halbritter and Amanda Blackhorse."

NCAI joined other national and local Native organizations and leaders, local civic leaders and academic experts in

engaging with the team's leadership during its comprehensive listening and learning process over the past several months, and it is committed to partnering with the team moving forward to share knowledge and information with its fan base, the Cleveland community, and schools across the country about Tribal nations, the mascot issue and the thoughtful process the team devised to address it.

NCAI is the oldest, largest and most representative national organization serving American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal nations and their citizens, and has been leading Indian Country's movement to eradicate offensive Native "themed" mascots from sports and popular culture for more than 50 years.

For more information, visit ncai.org.

Baseball's Cleveland Indians announce decision to change current team name

CLEVELAND – The Cleveland Indians today (Dec. 14, 2020) announced our decision to begin the process of changing from our team name "Indians."

Since July, we have conducted an extensive process to learn how our team name affected different constituencies and whether it aligned with our organizational values. As a result of that process, we have decided to move forward with changing

the current team name and determining a new, non-Native American based name for the franchise.

In our statement in June 2020, we acknowledged the importance of taking a leadership role in diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across the community and enhancing our support for underserved and under-represented groups. As part of that commitment, we heard from

individuals and groups who shared a variety of views and opinions on the issue.

We are deeply grateful for the interest and engagement from Native American communities, civic leaders, leading researchers, fans, corporate partners, players and internal teammates devoted to these formal and informal conversations. After reflecting upon those discussions, we believe our organization is at its best when we can unify our community and bring people together – and we believe a new name will allow us to do this more fully.

and input, which I found enlightening and insightful. When a sports team is aligned with its community, it unlocks the ability to unite people from different backgrounds and bring people together in support of their home team. While Indians will always be a part of our history, it is time to move forward and work to unify our stakeholders and fans through a new name."

The team's decision to change the current name is phase one of a multi-phase process. Future decisions, including new name identification and brand development, are complex and will take time. While we work to identify a new and enduring franchise name, we will continue using the Indians name.

The Cleveland Indigenous Coalition and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) were both active contributors to our listening and learning process. The Cleveland Indigenous Coalition provided the following statement about today's announcement:

The decision to move forward with a name change is just one of several efforts the organization is making to continue to unify our region. Through Cleveland Indians Charities and partnerships with local civic organizations and institutions, we will enhance our continuing support of underserved groups and work to create a stronger, more equitable community.

"For six decades our community has fought tirelessly to be recognized as diverse and vibrant, instead of portrayed in inaccurate and harmful ways. By agreeing to change the team name away from Indigenous themes, the Cleveland baseball team is helping to create a place where Native American children and their families feel valued and fully seen. During this period of transition, we look forward to continued collaborative efforts with the team to move in a direction of healing and to create a better future for all generations to come."

Currently, we are working with the Cleveland Indigenous Coalition along with other organizations to help support and raise awareness about the Native American community and other under-represented populations.

Team Owner and Chairman Paul Dolan said, "Hearing firsthand the stories and experiences of Native American people, we gained a deep understanding of how Tribal communities feel about the team name and the detrimental effects it has on them. We also spoke to local civic leaders who represent diverse populations in our city and who highlighted the negative impact our team name has had on our broader population and on under-represented groups across our community. I am truly grateful for their engagement

To learn more about Native American imagery and representation, and for more information on this announcement, visit MLB.com/CLETeamName.

About the Cleveland Indigenous Coalition: The Cleveland Indigenous Coalition consists of four Northeast Ohio Native American organizations: The American Indian Movement of Ohio, The Committee of 500 Years of Dignity & Resistance, the Lake Erie Native American Council and the Lake Erie Professional Chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society.

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