

Union Board Meeting 7-13-2020 – Public Speakers

1. Daisy Wilson – “Hello Everyone. My name is Daisy. I just graduated from 5th grade at Rosa Parks. I was active in Union Soccer, and I was also active in Pom at Union. Today I am here to support the changing of our mascot. I know that the mascot, The Redskins, is disrespectful to the tribes in Oklahoma; who have specifically been asking us to change the name of our mascot. But it’s also disrespectful to the students of Union who have to continue this ongoing conversation. Thank you for your time.”
2. Dezeray Edwards – “Good evening members of the board. My name is Dezeray Edwards and that was my daughter Daisy, that you got to hear from. We are a proud Union family in Zone 1 and have been actively involved in the Rosa Parks family. I’m proud of Union. I’m proud of what we have accomplished with our academics, with our sports teams and with the community that we have created. We are constantly improving and creating better spaces for our children, as evidenced by the fact that we have torn down our 43-year-old stadium and are building a beautiful new stadium that will be ready next fall. We have the opportunity right now to brand it with a mascot that our greater community can get behind. It is inappropriate for our school to continue to use the term ‘Redskin.’ Regardless if any offense is intended, it is an ethnic slur. This is an opportunity to become better and we have great leaders that have made the same decision. The Miami University of Ohio Redskins changed their name to the RedHawks. The Southern Nazarene University Redskins became the Crimson Storm. And today, Washington’s NFL team announced they are retiring the Redskins name. I would like to read the following statement from Chief Hoskin of the Cherokee Nation: ‘The Cherokee Nation will continue to urge team organizations, colleges and high schools to reconsider depictions of Native Americans as mascots, in chants and in other forms of team promotion. It is simply wrong to use Native American depictions across sports, especially Redskins, which is derogatory and offensive to native people. I applaud those teams and schools, like Union Public School officials, who are taking action to consider changing their team names and mascots. Dialogue on cultural appropriateness of Native Americans in this country are long overdue and we hope more schools and team organizations take note of Union’s leadership and begin their own internal discussions. Particularly when it comes to public schools, these discussions need to initially take place at the local level and such discussions have my full support.’ We have an obligation to our kids to do better. This is the perfect opportunity from a cost perspective with our new stadium, from an ethical perspective and from a community perspective to create a mascot that better represents the diversity, strength and character of our Union community. It’s never too late to do the right thing. Thank you all for your time.”
3. Jeremiah M. Jim Jr.- “Hello my name is Jackson Hicks and I will be going to the 6th and 7th grade center this coming fall. I love going to Union. I enjoy participating in the Native programs that Union provides. I like participating and representing Union in the Creek

Nation Challenge Bowl. However, I do not like our school's mascot. I have been voicing my opinion since 2015. I even went as far as approaching Dr. Hartzler when I was in the 2nd grade. I sometimes feel ashamed that I am a Native American and go to Union, because of how the mascot is portrayed. I am not able to show my pride for Union because all the shirts I have seen have the word 'Redskin' or a Native American symbol. I love to sing, and I will be joining the competition choir this year, but I am worried about being forced to sing a school song that has the word 'Redskins' in it. I would love to sing a school song that I can sing loud and proud. I am asking that after you form this committee, you decide NOT to use a Native mascot and that you use a mascot that we can ALL be proud of. Please be best and go all in. Thank you for your time."

4. Margaret Blalock Hicks – "Good evening Union family and friends, Union School Board, Dr. Hartzler. Thank you for allowing us to have this time to speak and thank you for bringing this important issue onto the table. My name is Margaret Hicks. I have four children here at Union; two in the 6th grade center and two at Ellen Ochoa. We are truly an inner-tribal family. We have eleven tribes running through our family's blood. We are Shawnee, Osage, Osegway, Peoria, Creek, Crow, Onondaga, Seminole, Pawnee, Otoe and Ponca Tribes. We are active in our Union community as well as our Native communities. In fact, if you look on your Union Redskins website you see our kids, my little family, shown. We love Union and I am a proud Union parent, just not a Redskin parent. Like many families we joined Union United for Change, not to tear down our school but to build something better. Something we can all be proud of. Union District continues to strive to be the leader in developing students to be college and career ready. Understanding this must involve social and emotional learning, so last year you guys created the Hope, Guidance and Social-Emotional Learning Department. Part of social-emotional learning is self-awareness and social-awareness. I can recall being at a meeting where a Union staff member kept saying 'It's hard to be a Redskin, it's hard to be a Redskin.' I kept thinking 'does he know the emotions that many families, including mine, attach to that word?' As an adult, I was able to reconcile those feelings. Now I ask you to imagine how a student feels, with that same emotional connotation to our mascot. To quote Union's Director of Hope, Scott Pennington, "I truly believe what our students need most from us, is us. We need to be willing to model for them what it means to be compassionate, empathetic, encouraging, caring, humbling, hardworking, vulnerable, passionate, trustworthy, etc. We need to see our students not just as students, but as human beings. Human beings with a story that's so often unlike our own.' I ask you to vote yes and go all in to form a diverse committee to eliminate our Native American mascot and to show everyone that Union is unity. And we will always hold high the values of honesty, integrity, transparency and do what's right and above. Thank you again for your time."
5. Sheyda Zakerion – "Good evening, my name is Sheyda Zakerion. I am a Union lifer, graduate from the class of 2011, future Union parent and voter in district 4. First, I would like to thank you Dr. Hartzler and the Board for taking up the reconsideration of this mascot. It takes courage and leadership to bring issues of our wounded histories

forward, but in doing so an incredible opportunity for healing emerges. As a Union lifer, pride for my alma mater runs deep. So many of my successes can only be credited to this incredible institution and the many staff, faculty and school leaders who invested in my development and are here tonight. I still remember learning about the six pillars of character as a young child; respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship and trustworthiness. It was at Union where I learned what it means to respect someone else. It was at Union where I learned what it means to be a leader and to help others. It was at Union that I learned the many values that have led me to be a strong advocate for change. Now, I have my own son who I hope to see graduate from Union someday. And as I prepare to teach him and instill these values in his life, I am really thankful he will attend a school that represents excellence in so many ways. But I can't help but to dread the day that I have to explain to him what this mascot means. I keep asking myself 'How can I teach him about respect when sanctioned disrespect is on display at school?' Union represents so many amazing values and this name isn't needed to uphold that message. It's time to choose a symbol that matches the standards of this great institution. My sister and I wanted to demonstrate just how much public support there is for the school district and for this change, so in one week we organized a coalition of students, parents, staff, faculty, alumni and native leadership representing over 1,000 people who want this change to happen now. On behalf of the group Union's United for Change, we ask that you vote yes tonight, and we ask that the committee you form finds a permanent solution for this mascot change and eliminates all uses of Native imagery and emblems across the District, including teepees. We ask that this committee represents a broad and diverse group of members with suggestions we provided you. We ask that this committee provides a clear and direct timeline that leads to productive dialogue and actionable results. Finally, we ask that this committee commits to creating a physically and emotionally safe environment for all students to thrive by outlining additional measures and curriculum changes the District can take toward building a diverse, inclusive and equitable learning environment for all. I love Union, thank you so much for hearing, thank you for taking the time and I'm excited for a yes vote tonight, thanks."

6. Angela Hamilton – "Good evening members of the board. My name is Angela Hamilton, but some of your Jefferson Students know me as Nurse Hamilton. I served as their healthcare provider for six wonderful years. I loved working in the best district in town and serving some of the best students in the District. I am also a proud Native American Apache parent who has had three students graduate from Union. I will always be Union for life, but I will never be a Redskin. My children, who were very active in sports, had to watch the misrepresentation of who we are as we portrayed on the football fields and on the sidelines with the mimicking of our Native American people with the teepees and warpaint and headdresses. My cheerleaders having to pretend to shout 'Go Redskins' in chants so that they wouldn't get in trouble with their coaches. My son having to wear uniforms with that name, even though we find the word very derogatory in our culture. Let's take a minute to review Union's core values that represent the Union way. Commitment to Excellence, pursue the highest measure of quality in all that we do.

Well, Union is the leader in excellence, and we want you to lead the way to change now. Collegiality; demonstrate respect and ability to work as a team member. Respect our culture and work within the community to find a solution to this name change. Honesty, Integrity and Transparency; do what's right above the board. Take the time right now to do what's right. The time for change is now. Innovation; embrace new and effective ways of thinking in programs. I know change is hard, but I know that we can think of a solution and learn to embrace it. Inclusiveness; cultivate an organizational culture of accepting children, families and employees for who they are rather than categorizing them by income, ethnicity or ability. See us for who we are and respect us and don't misrepresent our culture. Empowerment; help people reach their full potential. Help the Native American students and staff be culturally accepted and empowered. Accountability; accept responsibility for achieving these results and acknowledge the Redskin name and mascot are unacceptable derogatory terms and take the responsibility to make it right. Thoughtful Planning; use data and District values in planning and decision making. Listen to the individuals and leaders in our community and make the right decision as the other teams have done. 'Together We Can,' that's our moto at Union. Let's make this change and vote yes."

7. Jerril Billy – "Hi, my name is Jerril Billy. I am a proud citizen of the Choctaw Nation. My wife is a proud member of the Muskogee Nation. Our son, Tushka, goes to Boevers Elementary. As a 1st grader, Tushka came to us with a concern. He was in a class and a teacher had started a chant, the Redskins chant, and we had spoken to him about the term Redskins prior to him attending school. Unfortunately, he came back to us and we had to explain to him, we had to go him and let him know. It was a very difficult discussion to have with him. The mascot represents a racist term. It's unfortunate that Union Public Schools cannot be a leader in an effort to change this mascot. But we have an opportunity now. We have an opportunity to change a name, a term that's derogatory toward Native Americans. We hope that you will seize this opportunity to make a necessary change and end this use of this racist mascot. I am a product of the Oklahoma Public Schools system; my wife is a product of the Oklahoma Public School system. And during our time we have met many, many Native Americans that are also products. They are doctors, they are lawyers, they are teachers, they're engineers; but one thing that we are not, is we're not a Redskin. Thank you for your time"
8. Chad Best – "My name is Chad Best; I am the current chairperson of the Indian Education Parent Committee. I've served on the IEC for about 11 years. I'm Cherokee and have had three children attend Union. Currently, my son Braden is an incoming Freshman. I want to say in my years of working with Union administration and Dr. Hartzler specifically, that Union has been extremely supportive of our Native students. As I went to national conferences I learned that the support we have here is rare. It's different from the adversarial relationships that many JON programs have with their schools. I am certain that the intention at Union is to have honor and celebrating our Native heritage. I am hopeful that we can work with local tribes not to take a step backwards and stop celebrating our wonderful Native culture. I hope that when this

process is finished, we will still have honor for our Native students and their culture as strongly as before. It is clear, however, that the mascot, the teepee, the word Redskin needs to go. There's a long history of the word Redskin being tied to the institutionalized genocide of Native Americans. Redskins is not just a twisted compliment like savages, braves or red men; it represents a trophy of war. An ancestor slaughtered for money in an attempt to erase a people. A people who today are students waling our hallways, looking at this trophy reference plastered everywhere. I don't know how you look at his from this perspective and think that this is OK. There are many people, and even some Native Americans, who will tell you they are not offended by the Redskins term. But what about those who are? The most important piece of this is by far the student experience. We know there are many Native students who are deeply offended by this. Imagine you are a student excited to get your yearbook, but this term and imagery is all over it. Imagine being my daughter. And workout after workout, you go to tryouts with probably 100 girls there, and you make the basketball team and you get gear with 'Lady Redskins' all over it. My daughter wanted to be an engineer, and there are not a lot of female Native engineers. She met Cara Cowan-Watts, who was holding a scholarship workshop. Ms. Cowan-Watts was a Cherokee Tribal Council member, who also is a highly intelligent and accomplished engineer. She was a role model for my daughter as an example of what she had hoped to become. Ashlyn approached her after the workshop and was let into about the mascot, and how Ashlyn needed to be doing all these things to change it. She kind of came at Ashlyn for wearing the warm-up, after school at Union at a Union scholarship workshop. Needless to say, it was not the experience she had hoped that it would be, and we are setting up our children for situations such as these. While intentions are good, this racist term has been normalized. And it needs to be seen from the perspective of those who are offended by it. Our society had become so divisive, out schools should be a place that is inclusive. This is not the place for us vs them. There is plenty of this elsewhere. Thanks for your time."

9. Brayden Best – "Hi, my name is Brayden Best. This is the perspective of a Union Public Schools student who is Native and has hopes for change. I've always seen 'Reskins' as a normalized term that represents our school. In band one of our chants is called Cherokee. And after we play the pep tune, were all supposed to act like crazy and scream and go crazy. This is the image we've put on students like me. I've cheered and chanted that word and I was unaware of the racial slur it was. And I have taken pride in the fact that I am a Union Redskin, but that is not something I want to be proud of. If you have ever called a educated Native American that word, they would obviously freak out and that would offend them. So why would I want that to be a word that I am proud of. This is a word that I don't want anyone to be proud of, and that's why I am the point of view of a student who request change for the Union mascot."
10. Eddie Petherick – "Hello everyone. My name is Eddie Petherick. I have been a resident and property owner in the Union School District for over 30 years. All three of my

children completed grades K-12 at Union. I am both Muskogee-Creek and Cherokee. I am asking you to approve the formation of a committee to reevaluate the use of the Redskin mascot. From a personal perspective I suspect many of you think the definition of the mascot named Redskin with a capital 'R', is somehow different than the redskin with a lowercase 'r.' It's rather stunning that in the year 2020 we are still debating this. When someone refers to me or another Native American, either directly or indirectly, as A Redskin; I am both offended and threatened. To a greater degree, it is also hurtful. Especially when I know it inflicts emotional pain onto others, including members of my family. I am aware of the commitment and respect which you have shown to the Native American community. However, that does not offset the usage of an offensive mascot. Initially I was annoyed by the mention or display of Redskin at all school related functions. After all these years the annoyance is escalated exponentially. Let me assure you, there is a significant portion of the Native American population who want to see the mascot go away. While other in the community may oppose changing the mascot, my question to each of you on the board is this: Do any of you personally feel justified to call a Native American Redskin? When you are meeting with the Muskogee-Creek Nation or the Cherokee Nation leadership to discuss this issue will you refer to them as Redskin? I would like each of you to think about this question and if you feel the term is not offensive, please refrain from using it anyway. From a business perspective it makes no sense to keep the mascot name. The time and money wasted on a battle to save a mascot name is not reasonable nor economical. Eventually, if it has not happened already, sponsorships and business partnerships will be affected by the negative press and social media reputation. Fewer companies or institutions will want to associate with Union Public Schools. From an educational perspective, how will maintaining a perceived racist mascot benefit the students? Does this teach students that it is acceptable to call any Native American a Redskin? How many positive education success stories will be overlooked due to the offensive mascot name? The negative image from the press and social media that the Union School District receives gets reflected back on the students. As other school districts change their mascots, the Redskin scrutiny will only become more visible. Please consider these factors when determining whether the current mascot is sustainable. I suspect you will determine that the Redskin mascot is no longer tenable. In addition, please consult with Tribal leadership along with the wide spectrum of the Native American community. This issue will continue to escalate until the mascot is changed. I appreciate you all listening, and I thank you for taking the time to serve the community."

11. Caiden Catcher – "Hello, my name is Caiden Catcher... On the concern of the Redskin mascot controversy. Removal of the name Redskin and other Native American imagery, such as the teepee crew, should be immediate. The name was created by invading Europeans in the 18th century to demoralize, discriminate and dehumanize Native Americans. I implore the school board to remove the name Redskins from the school. Thank you for your time."

12. Leigh Roy – “...I stand before you as someone who was once, I believed myself to be a very proud Redskin. And it’s because I didn’t know any better. I was super excited because I wanted to show yes, I wanted to pay homage to our Native American culture and heritage and this is very, very important. My friends Julie Bushyhead, Tony Bearclaw and Marrisaa Deerinwater. When they would see photos I would post on FB where my children were wearing pictures of the mascot of Union Redskins, and they would see the words ‘Union Redskins.’ And then they would come to me and say ‘Leigh, why would you do this to us? It’s literally like you’re slapping us in the face.’ I would say no, no, no you don’t understand. Because in Union the culture is different and our children grow up and they aspire to be Redskins, because we know it’s something brave and wonderful. And that’s what we’ve taught our kids. And what they told me is, ‘Think about this, there will be a day when your children graduate, and they go out into the real world. And when that happens, they need to know they have been idolizing a racial slur.’ And that really spoke to me. And so, I think it’s important to note that I was once a proud Union Redskin because I didn’t know any better. But we’re now in a time and a culture of change, and we know better now so we can do better. Thank you for your time.”
13. Thomas Taylor – “Good evening. My name is Thomas Taylor. I am half Creek, of the Muskogee-Creek Nation...We are a community that operates as one unit in a particular organization. One word to the District is move forward with what is right in the victim’s eyes, and that victim would be anyone who is offended by any organization’s advertisement and logos mascot. This would allow any and everyone to participate in sports, academics, etc. and protect our future. My own son is confused, that says a lot considering we love our children and I speak for everyone since I am able to speak for people who care. I have two children, one in 11th and one in 10th. They are intelligent young men and understand but have no voice until now. The oldest is an artist, he’s in a band. The youngest is an athlete, and he plays football. So, they see what is created, by something that is bigger than they are. Perhaps, I hate to say it, idolatry. Let’s focus on what is happening to our children. Not just of color, but everyone with a heart. Thank you”
14. Michael Hamilton – “Hi, my name is Michael Hamilton. I really didn’t come here to speak tonight, but when I showed up at the Board of Education to watch the speech, I saw all the speakers who were there. I assume that’s pretty much how it’s went this whole way. Everybody wants to get rid of the name, and I’m obviously opposed to that. Union has always been about pride, and I’ve been taught you stand for something small for everything. And there might be someone who has a group on FB that has 1,000 followers, you know, there’s tens of thousands of people that went to Union that love to have that pride in Union Redskins. Everybody looks at that as a racist term, we look at it as pride. It’s prideful. Redskins, they were tough, they were warriors. Just like Jenks Trojans. Every time I talk to people and they’re like ‘oh what school did you go to?’ I went to Union Redskins. They’re like ‘Oh, OK,’ Everybody hates us cause were the best, we’ve been the best. Everybody’s going to be offended. Ya you might offend 1,000

people here, 2,000 people here. You're going to offend 10,000 people that have gone to Union. You know, this and that. If I stand up, I'm going to be the only voice here. There's probably going to be nobody else here that will speak up for it, I'll speak up for it. I hope you all make the great decision to vote no on it, to change the name. It's been 20 years ago I went through the same thing. I watched my Dad sit there and argue for the same thing, and I'll do the same. I hope you all make the right decision. I heard you earlier take the Constitution. The thing about the Constitution, number one is the freedom of speech. You can put that up there all you want. It doesn't matter what you change the name to, it's going to offend somebody. You keep the name; you stand up for something. Thank you."