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October 30, 2015

Dr. L. Jay Lemons, President
Susquehanna University
514 University Avenue
Selinsgrove, PA 17870

Dear President Lemons,

I am writing on behalf of a group of individuals who collectively disagree with your recommendation and the subsequent Board of Trustees decision to replace the Crusader identity of Susquehanna University. We would like to file this document as a formal Letter of Dissent regarding this decision.

Over the course of the last several days, we have heard from a large number of people who believe that this was the wrong decision. In spite of Susquehanna's efforts in soliciting input from interested parties, especially alumni, we believe that an adequate number of people were not reached in order to give a true indication of the feeling of those who would be affected by this decision. It is our hope that this letter will give you a clearer and more accurate picture of the opinions on this topic, and will at the very least spark some further discussion before any permanent changes are made.

We would like to address point-by-point the reasons for the change outlined in your letter of recommendation to the Board of Trustees dated October 23rd, 2015:

1. *Symbols are important and powerful. An institution's mascot and nickname should be beloved and unifying symbols. Susquehanna is a community where history and tradition are deeply appreciated. It was therefore surprising that only slightly more than half of those we heard from expressed support for retaining the "Crusader" nickname. Put another way, can you imagine nearly half of the alumni of institutions like Penn State, Notre Dame, or Michigan favoring moving away from their iconography?*

Out of the approximately 1,300 individuals you heard from as referenced earlier in your letter, only "slightly more than half" were in favor of retaining the Crusader name. However, the past several days have shown results contrary to this statement. Within the first 12 hours of the creation of a change.org petition to retain the name, we exceeded that number in people who were in support of the petition alone. At the time of this writing, the petition is rapidly nearing 2,000 supporters, and is still growing. A newly-created Facebook page received hundreds of "likes" in a matter of hours in support of the retention of the name. Social media pages that had already been in existence (e.g. the Susquehanna University official Facebook page, "You Know You Attended Susquehanna University if..." Facebook page, etc.) contain hundreds of comments that clearly show the overwhelming majority to be in favor of keeping the Crusader name. I won't speculate on why a

better response wasn't received to the online survey and in-person meetings after months of effort; but the people are speaking now – many of whom feel their voices were not heard, and many who feel they didn't receive the opportunity to have them heard at all.

I would also like to raise a point in reference to your statement regarding other institutions such as Penn State, Notre Dame, or Michigan. This is not an accurate comparison, as the entire alumni population of Susquehanna did not offer their opinions. To compare "slightly less than half of approximately 1,300 people" to the entirety of alumni of an institution like Penn State, who has an alumni population in the hundreds of thousands, is a skewed view. The statement is not "almost half" of Susquehanna's 18,000 alumni stated that they wanted to change the name. The statement is "almost half" of 1,300 of Susquehanna's alumni stated that they wanted to change the name. In other words, approximately 3%.

2. *For more than 50 years, Susquehanna has sought to be a more diverse and inclusive community. Susquehanna needs an unambiguous symbol that can help build spirit and pride; not one that offends or raises questions about this extraordinary institution.*

The symbol of the Crusader is not ambiguous in Susquehanna's context; the name "Crusader" has a noble and proud origin. This unique history is something to be celebrated; not feared. We should not become prisoners to an antiquated and former meaning of a word. Words only have the power given to them by the people who use them. What an amazing opportunity for Susquehanna to make the word "Crusader" mean to everyone exactly what it means to us: to be a person who campaigns vigorously for political, social, or religious change; a long and determined attempt to achieve something that you believe in strongly.

Take for example the word "Samaritan". In biblical times, Samaritans were reviled, and even considered evil. They introduced idols into the Jewish faith. They intermarried with Assyrians, which was contrary to biblical teaching. They were hated; especially by Jews. When Jesus told his parable of the Good Samaritan, people were horrified, because it was not thought possible that a Samaritan could be a good person. And over time and because of this unique story, the word evolved to become something commonly used today in reference to someone who is noble and good, and performs good deeds without thought of themselves. Can you imagine a person today being offended because someone called them a Good Samaritan?

Words are what you make of them. We need to be proud of our history and stand behind it. To fear the word "Crusader" is doing neither.

3. *(paraphrased) Since 1990, we have struggled and failed to find an alternative embodiment that captures the original spirit and intended meaning of the Susquehanna Crusaders.*

It is agreed that Susquehanna has not been successful in finding a mascot that both embodies the Crusader and is popular with the student body. However, there are many schools that have "difficult" nicknames for which a mascot is not obvious. There is really no reason why the mascot has to "match" the school nickname. Part of the reason the "Caped Crusader" failed was that a tiger has nothing to do with a Crusader. It was trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. If the mascot is simply a tiger, or a squirrel, or a susquatch, or a stag – or anything the student body could enjoy and have fun with – there's no reason why we still can't remain the "Crusaders", and have a different character running around on the sidelines interacting with the crowd. It seems to work rather well for the Philadelphia Phillies.

4. *Our ambivalence and discomfort with the “Crusader” nickname has contributed to its decline. We have not been able to attach our identity to our own definition of “Crusader” (engaged, sustained effort to advance a worthy cause). To re-brand “Crusader” now, while highly laudable would be extremely challenging, especially at a time when the term is being daily re-associated with religious violence.*

As stated above, the vast majority of comments received this week alone show that many in the Susquehanna community are hardly ambivalent and/or uncomfortable with the “Crusader”. And many have expressed a great willingness and pride in the opportunity to explain our history to anyone interested. Many who didn’t actually know the specific history, and were just proud of the word in its common and modern context, are even more proud of it now that they do know. A document is attached to this email that contains a summary of the comments left on the change.org petition. I encourage you to read them, so you may know the passion felt by the Susquehanna community on this issue.

We acknowledge that re-branding “Crusader” would be challenging, but would it be as difficult as creating an entirely new identity? Is it worth the price of stepping away from our history and tradition? Is it worth devaluing the unique reasons that make us true Crusaders?

It’s quite possible that there may be some individuals who, in this modern age, still associate the word “Crusade” with religious violence. In fact, it’s quite similar to the word “mission”, a word that, contrary to “Crusade”, is still used in this day and age to describe military operations. However, much like a self-described Crusader, many people fighting for a good cause will describe themselves as “being on a mission”, and yet there are no military connotations or assumptions. Why should the word “Crusader” be any different?

5. *We have no idea how many people have been turned off or turned away from the University because of our nickname. During this review, some members of our community described the use of the term “Crusader” as problematic. Various, I heard alumni, students, faculty and parents say that the nickname gave them pause and made them unsure about whether Susquehanna would be a welcoming and comfortable community. Others expressed concerns about the problematic nature of Crusader reference on apparel, resumes, news reports, etc. as they live, work and travel around the globe where nuanced explanations aren’t always possible.*

A hypothetical problem is not necessarily a problem. From the materials that have been shared by Susquehanna, both enrollment and donations have increased steadily over the years. Anyone who steps foot on Susquehanna’s campus knows that it is a welcoming community. If the worry is that the culture may cause some people to look at Susquehanna and think that the word “Crusader” may make it an unwelcoming place, then change the culture. Own our history. Embrace it. Speak about it. Make it a more visible part of who we are. Go beyond a short blurb on the Athletics page of the website, and market Susquehanna as a place that is committed to the very ideals that make us Crusaders in the first place.

We are fortunate to live in a country that allows us to express ourselves freely. Other countries are not so fortunate. Our alumni, students, faculty, and parents may live, work, and/or travel to some of these places. And although it’s true that nuanced explanations aren’t always possible in all situations, we should feel an obligation when in another country to keep in mind what may or may not be offensive to that culture. I would avoid baring my arms when visiting Morocco. I would not leave my head uncovered if in Iran. Should the sale of tank tops be banned in the United States, because someone may travel to Morocco and give the wrong impression by wearing them? If one

travels to a country in which there's a chance the word "Crusader" may be offensive, it is the traveler's obligation to make a more respectful choice. There are many other ways to show Susquehanna pride.

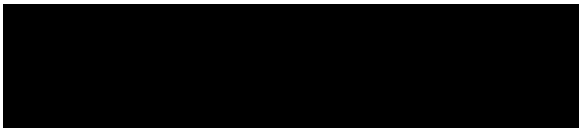
6. *While for many the discussion of this subject smacks of "political correctness", our willingness to engage the discussion is the antidote to such criticism. Political correctness very often prevents such discourse, so appropriate in higher education. If the Board supports my recommendation, it will not be an act of caving to political correctness but an act of conscience as we seek to live out a commitment to being an inclusive and diverse community of learners and scholars and to developing symbols that unify, strengthen, and bring pride to our community.*

This decision may not be labeled "political correctness", but it does not do what a strong institution such as Susquehanna should do: embrace its name and its heritage and be proud of it, never allowing it to be changed or misinterpreted. Referring back to your comparison of Susquehanna with other institutions, the mascot for Notre Dame could be considered offensive to someone of Irish descent who does not like being lampooned as a pugilistic leprechaun. However, Notre Dame has a history and long-standing tradition as the "Fighting Irish", and I can't imagine them allowing that tradition to be compromised.

A recent statement made by Susquehanna on their official Facebook page stated, "Those that love Susquehanna know that we are more than a nickname." And that's true. For those of us who attended Susquehanna, "Crusader" is far more than a nickname. It is an identity. It is the embodiment of what you, and the leaders who came before you, taught us to be. To be people who stand up for what they believe in; to fight for what is right and just and good. To be passionate about and defend a cause. This is one of those causes, and we do not take it lightly. If we don't question this process and make our feelings known in a productive manner, then we're not living up to the very values instilled in us by the name we care about so deeply. Crusaders are not just what we were. Crusaders are what we are.

We would like to request that you forward this letter to the members of the Susquehanna University Board of Trustees for their review. It is our hope that at the very least, this information will cause you to reconsider your recommendation before irreversible actions are taken. Please do not dismiss our concerns. We welcome further discussion and look forward to the opportunity to share our feelings with you in another setting. Please feel free to contact me at the below e-mail address if you are interested in doing so.

Respectfully,



Kathy (Pioli) Lubbers, class of '92
Former SU staff member
Former SU adjunct faculty member
Lifetime Crusader

