



FREEDOM ALLIANCE[®]

"THE PRICE OF LIBERTY IS ETERNAL VIGILANCE"

Oliver L. North
Founder & Honorary Chairman

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President

June 21, 2017

Mr. Max Kellerman
ESPN, First Take
ESPN Plaza
545 Middle Street, Building 4
Bristol, CT 06010

Dear Mr. Kellerman,

I write to challenge a portion of the commentary you made on ESPN's "First Take" on June 15, 2017. At issue are the thoughts you offered while comparing the social protest legacies of Muhammed Ali and Colin Kaepernick. Leaving the Ali analysis aside, you said of Mr. Kaepernick's decision to protest the National Anthem:

Colin Kaepernick also did not go looking for a protest. It came to him. He was asked to stand for the national anthem. You do not have to stand for the national anthem. And even if it was a rule that you did, is that Colin Kaepernick injecting politics in the NFL? No. That's the NFL injecting politics by playing the national anthem and putting pressure on you to stand for it in the first place.

Max, your remarks on this issue are foolish, irrational and uninformed. Allow me to address each of your points, from the perspective of one who leads Freedom Alliance, a charitable organization which honors and assists thousands of America's military, veterans, and their families each year. Freedom Alliance also provides millions of dollars in college scholarships to the children of fallen military heroes; the same heroes whose caskets are adorned with the flag for which Mr. Kaepernick holds contempt.

To protest the National Anthem is to protest the American flag and the nation. Each transcends the boundaries of politics and partisanship. They are symbols of our national unity. The flag has always represented American pride and achievement. Millions of widows and children, in their time of grief, have been presented that flag: "On behalf of the President of the United States...and a grateful nation."

To suggest, as you do, that offering NFL fans the opportunity to stand for our Anthem and celebrate our country and its heroes is "injecting politics" is among the more cynical comments I have heard.

Now, to address the specifics of your commentary.

“Colin Kaepernick did not go looking for a protest. It came to him.” Wrong. How, precisely, did it come to him? For nearly one hundred years, professional athletes have stood during the National Anthem prior to their games. It was Kaepernick, of his own volition, and with a history of social activism, who decided to selfishly disrespect the flag and the Anthem.

His was not a spur-of-the-moment decision, nor was he swept up in the winds of social activism during the pregame. He decided to use the pre-game ceremony to orchestrate a visible, controversial, and disrespectful protest. His was a poor decision, not an impulsive one.

“He was asked to stand for the national anthem. You do not have to stand for the national anthem.” In “Dante’s Journey,” J.C. Marino wrote, “Small men command the letter of the law. Great men serve its spirit.” Colin Kaepernick is a small man in this regard. I concede that Kaepernick did not violate a federal statute or an NFL regulation by sitting. He did, however, violate the rules of good citizenship and common decency. The issue is not his right to sit or stand. The issue is his obligation to his employer and his teammates; his unsportsmanlike conduct to the NFL and League officials; his lack of courtesy to the tens of thousands of stadium fans and millions of viewers on television; his insult to the uniformed military on the field displaying the flag; and his willful ignorance toward those, living or dead, who fought for our country. The issue, in short, is what his actions say about his spirit as an American.

“And even if it was a rule that you did, is that Colin Kaepernick injecting politics in the NFL? No. That’s the NFL injecting politics by playing the national anthem and putting pressure on you to stand for it in the first place.” This point has been previously addressed. However, I would suggest it is juvenile for you to blame the NFL for Colin Kaepernick’s disgraceful behavior. He made the decision to politicize the Anthem, nobody else. If you, Max, feel “pressured” to stand for the National Anthem, I’d invite you to examine your conscience and ask, “why?” Why are you so disdainful or conflicted about your country that you can’t stand for a moment of national unity?

As Americans, we rise to our feet to express our respect for institutions and celebrate achievements. We stand when the President of the United States enters the room. We stand when the bailiff announces the Judge is entering the courtroom. We stand when the bride begins her walk down the aisle. We stand for the Hallelujah Chorus because doing otherwise would break a great tradition and be an insult to beautiful music.

Ours is a great country, worthy of respect. By protesting the Anthem, Mr. Kaepernick did not select a specific flaw to condemn and correct: He threw the whole country under the bus. I ask you to consider these points and be more judicious in your defense of anti-American inanity.

Respectfully,
Thomas P. Kilgannon
President