



Special Olympics

February 5, 2010

Mr. Rush Limbaugh
1270 Ave of The Americas, 9th Floor
NY, NY 10020

Dear Mr. Limbaugh:

I incredulously listened to the segment in your show in which you repeatedly and offensively used the term “retard” in reference to our meeting with White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel.

As a public figure, you have the great opportunity to influence the hearts and minds of millions of people in this country and around the world. People with intellectual disabilities – the largest group of people with disabilities in the world – have suffered generations of discrimination and humiliation. In the 21st century, they, together with their families and friends, are continuing their battle for the simplest form of justice: the justice that comes with a recognition of their full humanity. In their eyes and in the hearts of millions of others who love and care about them, language is important. So together, we have chosen to try to sensitize others to the pervasive but often ignored prejudice they suffer by asking for a change of language and a change of heart. For you or for anyone else to mock those who strive, often against long odds, for the recognition and respect they deserve, seems gratuitously hurtful and degrading.

Our message is as simple as it is powerful: people with intellectual disabilities are human beings. Gaining social recognition of that humanity continues to be an elusive goal for them and for those who love and care about them. For centuries, they have borne the stigma of institutionalization, sterilization, social isolation, and bigotry. The names associated with them – such as “retarded” and “retard” – have for too long been used as cruel taunts.

Despite the searing pain that this word (and others) has visited on millions, people with intellectual disabilities have nonetheless persevered to try to gain their dignity. For half a century, mothers, fathers, siblings, and people with intellectual disabilities have worked to open the eyes of the world to the simple truth that each of us has gifts. They do not deserve to be mocked by you.

Our “Spread the Word to End the Word” campaign is aimed at changing the perception that the R-word is acceptable and the good news is that the world is beginning to slowly change. Classrooms are becoming more tolerant, communities more accepting and the work place more inclusive as people with intellectual disabilities are slowly being seen for what we’ve always

known them to be – people of value who help us all to understand we are each gifted in unique ways. But this change is too slow and each use of the R-word as a synonym for a stupid action, a schoolyard taunt, or the punch line of a joke, slows our progress immeasurably.

Great heroes like Special Olympics athlete Loretta Claiborne, are visiting school after school to explain that "retard" and "retarded" are words that caused them unbearable pain as children and continue to reflect deep misunderstanding today. Loretta has the courage to face her disability in public, to ask that others treat her with respect, and to ask for more sensitive and caring attitudes in the future. In response, many are joining her, Special Olympics, Best Buddies, and a coalition of organizations in asking children to pledge never to use the word again – not as a joke, not as a description of behavior, not as an epithet. In my own experience, when I ask people – be they first graders or media figures – to join in stopping the casual use of the word "retarded", they universally agree to do so. Most want to go further: they want to understand better how they can serve as agents of acceptance and dignity.

Loretta is a role model and if given the chance to speak her mind on your program, she and many others like her would inspire you and your audience with her wisdom and toughness. This is a teachable moment. May I ask you to join her now by ending your use of this term and by further using your great influence and position to help others do the same?

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Shriver". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Timothy P. Shriver, Ph.D.
Chairman & CEO