



January 6, 2015

The Honorable Steve Scalise
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Scalise:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national organizations working to protect and advance civil and human rights, and the National Urban League, a historic civil rights and urban advocacy organization founded in 1910 dedicated to economic empowerment in historically underserved urban communities, improving the lives of tens of millions of people nationwide through direct service programs implemented by its 95 Urban League affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia, we write to express our deep concern regarding your acknowledged 2002 speech before the European-American Unity and Rights Organization (EURO)ⁱ, a white supremacist, anti-Semitic, and neo-Nazi organization classified by the Anti-Defamation Leagueⁱⁱ and the Southern Poverty Law Centerⁱⁱⁱ as a hate group. Participation in the 2002 EURO conference by any member of Congress would be troubling. However, it is of particular concern to us that a member chosen to be part of the Majority's leadership team in the House of Representatives, whose responsibilities include protecting the interests of all Americans, would legitimize the existence of such a group.

We are writing to request the opportunity to meet with you to discuss ways to work together for the good of all of the Americans that you represent, regardless of race or religion, in order to help move forward after the serious and legitimate concerns that your participation in this event has raised.

As you undoubtedly know, our nation has a long and troubled history of racially polarized politics in which “wink and nod” gestures of affinity with racial segregationists and anti-Semites are used to divide Americans along racial lines and to appeal to our worst instincts. In that regard – and notwithstanding your explanation – there is a question about whether your 2002 speech to EURO was a subtle “dog whistle” of affinity to David Duke's group of supporters. While we would prefer not to believe this, as you might imagine, we believe the questions surrounding the current controversy deserve further clarification.

We acknowledge and appreciate your condemnation of the views of the group and your statement that you “reject that kind of hateful bigotry.”^{iv} To be candid, however, it seems implausible to us that, as a state representative with national aspirations at the time, you would not have heard about the Louisiana-based EURO, which was already a well-known hate group led by America's most famous white

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supremacist, former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke. While you indicated that, had you known of the affiliation, you never would have accepted an invitation to speak to a David Duke-sponsored group, you have also stated that the invitation to speak came from Kenny Knight, a long-time associate of David Duke and one of your neighbors.^v As you might imagine, it is difficult to fathom how you would accept an invitation from a Duke associate to speak to a group that you do not know, and yet, ask no questions about the engagement.

In addition, awareness of the group and its beliefs was well-known and widely condemned at the time. Newspapers reported that a minor league baseball team from Iowa had changed hotels after learning that the 2002 Euro conference would be held where the team planned to stay,^{vi} and the management of the conference hotel distanced itself publically from EURO's ideology while honoring its contract for the event. EURO's activities in South Carolina and Virginia around that time were also reported in USA Today and the *Washington Post*. The organization and its conference were a much reported controversy.^{vii}

Our concern over your participation in this event is that, in some instances, it might indicate a genuine affinity with some positions taken by EURO or Duke himself. Substance and symbolism, in that regard, are important. For example, in 1999 – three years before you spoke to EURO – *Roll Call* reported that you were said to embrace “many of the same conservative views of Duke,” but were “far more viable.” In fact *Roll Call* quoted you as saying that “Duke has proven he can't get elected, and that's the first and most important thing.”^{viii} Later that year, you voted against making Martin Luther King, Jr. Day a state holiday – one of just three state representatives to do so, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. And in 2004, two years after the EURO conference where you spoke, you were one of six to vote against the holiday.

You apparently took a similar position involving the naming of a U.S. Post Office for Louisiana civil rights icon, the Honorable Lionel Collins, a pioneering civil rights lawyer and the first African-American judge in Jefferson Parish, La. Judge Collins, who died in 1988, is greatly revered and remembered annually with a New Orleans dinner in his honor. As we understand it, HR 5933 (110th Congress) was co-sponsored by five members of the Louisiana House delegation. However, your refusal to co-sponsor the bill prevented the Chairman of the Subcommittee, Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.), from proceeding because of the Subcommittee's requirement for unanimity for such efforts.

By themselves, your votes on the symbolic initiatives of the King Holiday and the Collins USPS facility were disappointing. Combined with the current controversy, however, they raise serious and legitimate questions about whether, in your new role as a member of the House leadership, you can be fair to all of the interests you will be charged to represent. The Boston Herald has similarly suggested that, without fully addressing this controversy, your position in leadership raises concerns.^{ix}

We are requesting, by way of this letter, the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these concerns and related issues regarding the leadership agenda for the 114th Congress. Most

specifically, we wish to discuss your position regarding efforts to repair the Voting Rights Act, the most important civil rights act since the passage of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and which was gutted by the U.S. Supreme Court's 5-4 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013). We also wish to discuss your views on legal efforts to overturn President Obama's executive action on immigration reform and congressional efforts to invest in our public transportation systems, rebuilding roads, bridges and public facilities as a mechanism for job creation.

As you have stated "Those who know me best know I have always been passionate about helping, serving, and fighting for every family that I represent."^x We look forward to working with you on ways that we might work together to do that.

Thank you in advance for considering our views and our request. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the questions we've raised and these important issues for our nation. If you have any questions, please contact either of us or Lisa Bornstein, Legal Director for The Leadership Conference, (Bornstein@civilrights.org) at 202-466-3311.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO
The Leadership Conference on
Civil and Human Rights



Marc Morial
President & CEO
National Urban League
Chair of Governance Committee for The Leadership
Conference on Civil and Human Rights

ⁱ EURO archived website. "White Civil Rights: The Website for Europeans and Americans Wherever They May Live." https://web.archive.org/web/20120204211507/http://www.whitecivilrights.com/euro%E2%80%99s-principles_63.html

ⁱⁱ Anti-Defamation League archived webpage. "Extremism in America: David Duke: Affiliations." [http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/david_duke/affiliations.html?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism in America&xpicked=2&item=david_duke](http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/david_duke/affiliations.html?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism%20in%20America&xpicked=2&item=david_duke)

ⁱⁱⁱ Southern Poverty Law Center. "Extremist Files: EURO." <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/groups/euro>

^{iv} Costa, Robert. "Scalise Releases New Statement of 'Regret' for 2002 Speech; Boehner Backs Him." *Washington Post*. December 30, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/12/30/scalise-releases-new-statement-of-regret-for-2002-speech-boehner-backs-him/>

^v Costa, Robert. "Former KKK Leader Says His Political Adviser was 'Friendly' with Rep. Scalise." *Washington Post*. December 30, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/12/30/former-kkk-leader-says-his-political-adviser-was-friendly-with-rep-scalise/>

^{vi} Thompson, Catherine. "Iowa Baseball Team Avoided Hotel Where Scalise Spoke To White Nationalists." December 30, 2014.

<http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/baseball-team-avoided-david-duke-group-scalise>

^{vii} Costa, Robert and O’Keefe, Ed. “House Majority Whip Scalise confirms he spoke to white supremacists in 2002.” December 29, 2014.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/house-majority-whip-scalise-confirms-he-spoke-to-white-nationalists-in-2002/2014/12/29/7f80dc14-8fa3-11e4-a900-9960214d4cd7_story.html

^{viii} Lesniewski, Nels. “What Scalise and Vitter Told Roll Call About David Duke in 1999.” December 29, 2014.

<http://blogs.rollcall.com/218/scalise-vitter-talked-to-roll-call-about-david-duke-in-1999/?dcz=>

^{ix} Boston Herald, Editorial, “A Time to Stand Aside.” Jan 4, 2015.

http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/opinion/editorials/2015/01/editorial_a_time_to_stand_aside

^x Costa, Robert. “Scalise Releases New Statement of ‘Regret’ for 2002 Speech; Boehner Backs Him.” *Washington Post*. December 30, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/12/30/scalise-releases-new-statement-of-regret-for-2002-speech-boehner-backs-him/>