

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, November 14, 2012 2:31 PM
To: 'Betsy.Ebeling@Illinois.gov'
Subject: Re:

I loved this--what a brave guy.

This reply shows how far behind I am in responding to emails! Between losing my internet/berry service for two weeks during Sandy and jet lagging around the world, I'm not sure what I never received but am trying to crawl out from under the ones that are piled up in my in box.

Love from Adelaide!

From: Ebeling, Betsy [mailto:Betsy.Ebeling@Illinois.gov]
Sent: Friday, October 26, 2012 09:47 AM Eastern Standard Time
To: H
Subject:

Thought of you and all the work you do each and every day when I read this editorial and John Franklin Stephens' letter. How far we have come yet how backward we remain.

From a Chicago Tribune Editorial today

October 26, 2012

John Franklin Stephens is a Special Olympics athlete who has written a letter that we hope all Americans will read.

He wrote it earlier this week to conservative political pundit Ann Coulter after she used the word "retard" to refer to President Barack Obama. Coulter's disgraceful tweet came during the debate Monday between Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney: "I highly approve of Romney's decision to be kind and gentle to the retard," alluding to Romney's strategy of not directly attacking Obama.

The casual use of the word is repugnant to people who have learning or developmental disabilities, and to the people who love them.

Stephens called Coulter on it and reminded Americans why the word hurts.

"Come on Ms. Coulter, you aren't dumb and you aren't shallow," Stephens wrote. "So why are you continually using a word like the R-word as an insult? I'm a 30-year-old man with Down syndrome who has struggled with the public's perception that an intellectual disability means that I am dumb and shallow. I am not either of those things, but I do process information more slowly than the rest of you. In fact, it has taken me all day to figure out how to respond to your use of the R-word last night ...

"... After I saw your tweet, I realized you just wanted to belittle the president by linking him to people like me. You assumed that people would understand and accept that being linked to someone like me is an insult and you assumed you could get away with it and still appear on TV. I have to wonder if you considered other hateful words but recoiled from the backlash. Well, Ms.

Coulter, you, and society, need to learn that being compared to people like me should be considered a badge of honor. No one overcomes more than we do and still loves life so much. Come join us someday at Special Olympics. See if you can walk away with your heart unchanged.

Stephens signed the letter "a friend you haven't made yet." It's posted on the specialolympics.org Web site. Take a moment to read it.

Then ... next time you hear someone toss this hateful word off, in jest or in mockery, don't let it pass. Don't laugh or shrug. Tell them how deep that word cuts. How much it hurts. How toxic it is.

In 2009, Special Olympics launched a campaign called Spread the Word to End the Word. In a Tribune commentary, Maria King Carroll of West Peoria promoted that idea by telling readers about her brother, Joseph, who was born with developmental disabilities in 1966. "Today my brother lives in a supervised group home where he needs help with personal hygiene and can't drive a car," she wrote. "He also has a job, is a passionate fan of the Dallas Cowboys, comes home most weekends, and has one of the most finely calibrated moral compasses I've ever seen. ... Our world is much richer when all of us get to contribute our gifts. But it's hard to see people's value when names like retard are acceptable."

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Here is the letter:

An Open Letter to Ann Coulter

Posted on [October 23, 2012](#) by [Tim Shriver](#)

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John Franklin Stephens

The following is a guest post in the form of an open letter from Special Olympics athlete and global messenger John Franklin Stephens to Ann Coulter after [this tweet](#) during last night's Presidential debate.

Dear Ann Coulter,

Come on Ms. Coulter, you aren't dumb and you aren't shallow. So why are you continually using a word like the R-word as an insult?

I'm a 30 year old man with Down syndrome who has struggled with the public's perception that an intellectual disability means that I am dumb and shallow. I am not either of those things, but I do process information more slowly than the rest of you. In fact it has taken me all day to figure out how to respond to your use of the R-word last night.

I thought first of asking whether you meant to describe the President as someone who was bullied as a child by people like you, but rose above it to find a way to succeed in life as many of my fellow Special Olympians have.

Then I wondered if you meant to describe him as someone who has to struggle to be thoughtful about everything he says, as everyone else races from one snarkey sound bite to the next.

Finally, I wondered if you meant to degrade him as someone who is likely to receive bad health care, live in low grade housing with very little income and still manages to see life as a wonderful gift.

Because, Ms. Coulter, that is who we are – and much, much more.

After I saw your tweet, I realized you just wanted to belittle the President by linking him to people like me. You assumed that people would understand and accept that being linked to someone like me is an insult and you assumed you could get away with it and still appear on TV.

I have to wonder if you considered other hateful words but recoiled from the backlash.

Well, Ms. Coulter, you, and society, need to learn that being compared to people like me should be considered a badge of honor.

No one overcomes more than we do and still loves life so much.

Come join us someday at Special Olympics. See if you can walk away with your heart unchanged.

A friend you haven't made yet,
John Franklin Stephens
Global Messenger
Special Olympics Virginia

EDITOR'S NOTE: John has previously written powerful opinion pieces on the R-word. [Read one here.](#)

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Please note: the new IDHR website: www.illinois.gov/dhr

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