



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

For Immediate Release - MONDAY, JUNE 26, 2023 **Blair County NAACP Concludes Aviation Inn Investigation**

On Friday, May 18, 2023, a woman named Kassie placed a to-go order for a blackened chicken panini sandwich to an employee at The Aviation Inn restaurant in Duncansville. The employee, known as Carl or "Pugs", retrieved the order for pick-up by Kassie. Once home, Kassie looked at her meal receipt and discovered a racially-derogatory comment, which sparked intense public scrutiny. This announcement contains the details of the subsequent investigation of the incident by the Blair County NAACP Branch #2252.

In a May 24th interview, Kassie told Blair Co. NAACP President Andrae Holsey that she immediately called the restaurant's owner, Allen Butterbaugh. In this call, Kassie told Butterbaugh how she had "been in this place many times and never had an issue". He replied that "this was a joke amongst the kitchen," and "this got out of hand," before handing the phone to "Pugs." Both Butterbaugh and Kassie confirm that "Pugs" told her "It wasn't me, sorry", before hanging up.

Disturbed by the exchange, Kassie posted a picture of the receipt on Facebook at 3:47PM on the same day. The receipt read "Server: Pugs, Printed: 18-May-2023 12:46:14P, TO GO #3 nigger chik." According to The Altoona Mirror's Rachel Foor in her May 24, 2023 article "Slur use sparks firing, backlash: Aviation restaurant receipt goes viral over racial epithet", the post would be shared 247 times, with 219 reactions and 57 comments, before appearing on the subreddit r/Pennsylvania, where it received 1,600 upvotes and 332 comments.

On June 23rd, President Holsey, Executive Committee Chairman Tracy N. Brown, and First Vice President Darius Morgan met directly with Butterbaugh to discuss conclusions and possible resolutions. The following conclusions were produced after this meeting:

1. The use of racial epithets or derogatory comments is appalling. While the NAACP defends the rights of everyday Americans, including freedom of speech, we do not condone any words or actions which harm others. The frequent use of these terms in a public space is the direct result of unacceptable levels of comfort when degrading minorities and can not be tolerated. The Blair County NAACP will maintain an active role in educating the public against prejudiced behavior.
2. Threats of violence against The Aviation Inn and the NAACP in the month after the incident are equally appalling and highly discouraged. The officers of Branch #2252 do not promote violence against restaurant owners and are readily tracking all threats to our organization as we pursue racial equity and justice in Blair County.
3. As a small-business owner it is necessary to plan for and respond appropriately to bias/prejudice incidents in one's business. Allen Butterbaugh, as owner of the Aviation Inn Restaurant, needed to take a more proactive role in preventing these incidents by establishing a code of ethics or conduct for The Aviation Inn. Following this incident, Mr. Butterbaugh has agreed to work with the NAACP on doing so.

4. While this incident is unique to the current staff of the Aviation Inn, a similar incident occurred nearly 10 years ago at the same establishment with the owner's brother, Brian Butterbaugh. Allen indicated that misconduct by Brian, who has convictions for assault, terroristic threats, DUI, and resisting arrest, was "unsurprising," and terminated his employment nearly 9 years ago. Allen did not appear to be knowledgeable of race-related exchanges by Brian while employed as a bartender at The Aviation Inn.
5. "Pugs" justified his use of the "N-word" repeatedly to management, patrons, and community members by citing membership in the Arandale Elks Lodge and stating "I'm a brother, and can say that word when I want." The Arandale Elks, a historically-black fraternal organization in Altoona, has been a lifetime member of the NAACP since November of 1957. The use of minority associations, like Elks Club membership, as justification for ethnic intimidation are an egregious abuse of membership privilege. The NAACP will initiate conversation with the lodge for revocation of Carl's membership.
6. Many of the comments submitted to the Blair County NAACP regarding this situation were found to be tainted by personal agendas or disagreements. As such, we can not consider those reports to be credible and are restricted from acting upon them. We encourage those who contact the branch with information to do so with complete transparency and as much accuracy as possible. Members of the public are still encouraged to contact the branch at admin@blairconaacp.org if further details arise.
7. While the NAACP can not control the actions of individuals, we do our best to respond to incidents and refer those to legal authorities for review. During our investigation, we found (and restaurant owners agree) that "Pugs" likely decided to include the derogatory receipt after seeing Kassie. As such, we highly encourage the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission and local law enforcement to pursue charges of Ethnic Intimidation against "Pugs". And, while we do encourage stronger involvement by Aviation Inn owners in the goings-on of their business, we do not believe that management or owners encouraged bias/prejudice with malicious intent. Any indication otherwise following the publishing of this report will result in a similar recommendation for Allen Butterbaugh and his partners.
8. Regardless of outcome, we remain committed to equitable dispensing of justice in Blair County and refute any threats of violence against involved parties. Taking matters into one's own hands with violence threatens the integrity of the judicial process and therefore obstructs the progress of our legal system in protecting racial/ethnic equality.

In conclusion, the Blair County NAACP is elated that The Aviation Inn is willing and able to make changes to its business to protect minority patrons and employees. We further applaud the bravery of Kassie in reporting this incident to the branch and encourage other members of the public to do the same, should they experience bias/prejudice. We respond to incident reports as soon as possible in a region plagued by racial division. The Aviation Inn, which boasts excellent reviews and stellar inspection reports, has taken an important step in the right direction by agreeing to work with the NAACP. Together, as a community, we can ensure that Blair County is a pleasant place to eat, work, and live for everyone, regardless of the color of their skin.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Andrae M. Holsey, available at admin@blairconaacp.org.