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Senator John M. "Jake" Knotts, Jr.  
303 Gressette Bldg.  
Columbia, SC 29201

**RE: Comments on Pub Politics Referring to President Obama and Senator Haley as 'ragheads'**

Dear Senator Knotts:

On behalf of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the over 500,000 Sikh Americans across the country, I write to you today to urge you issue a formal apology for the divisive and bigoted comments you made yesterday on a local political talk show, *Pub Politics*.

During the show, you recklessly denigrated both President Barack Obama and South Carolina State Senator and Gubernatorial Candidate Nikki Haley by saying, "We've already got a raghead in the White House, we don't need another raghead in the governor's mansion."

Your remarks categorizing turbans and people of Sikh American heritage – who wear *dastaars* (Sikh turban) –, not to mention individuals of Arab, Muslim and South Asian backgrounds 'ragheads' is wholly unacceptable and serve to further drive a wedge between the diverse communities that make up our country. Additionally, your comments about Senator Haley "pretending to be someone she is not" falsely claim that people of a certain background or faith need to somehow validate how "American" they are or prove their patriotism or loyalty to this country. Finally, and most disturbing, your reckless comments could potentially incite misguided retribution in America against Sikh, Muslim and Arab Americans, similar to what we saw across the country in the wake of the tragic 9/11 attacks.

As you may know, the Sikh religion was founded in South Asia over 500 years ago by Guru Nanak. There are more than 25 million Sikhs throughout the world and approximately 500,000 adherents of the Sikh religion in the United States. Observant Sikhs are distinguished by *dastaars*, uncut hair, and other articles of faith, and are regrettably subjected to hate crimes, workplace discrimination, denial of public accommodation, and school bullying because of their religious background.

As Americans and people of conscience we will not tolerate your remarks and encourage you to issue a public apology for your ignorant statements and stand against any attacks based on perceived, race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. While we recognize your attempt to retreat from your comments, by saying they were "intended [in a] humorous context" and that the humor "was lost in translation", we feel this falls short of a true and appropriate apology, and hold you to the high standard that all public officials should have. We urge you to issue an apology that adequately recognizes the hate filled history of your remark.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this deeply important matter. We look forward to hearing you.

Sincerely,

Jasjit Singh  
Associate Executive Director