



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 20, 2018

Dear Rock101st:

I appreciate that you have, since resigning, admitted error. As they say, admitting one's mistake is the first step toward solving one's problem. It is true, you were the first candidate on my shortlist for Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (in fact, I was hours from announcing you—until you departed). Nor do I deny that you have skills that can be used and applied productively—your record is impressive, and I doubt none that you are an honorable individual.

So I take as true your claim that you were led astray by individuals with malicious intent. Unfortunately, however, actions have consequences. And given that your experience stems from military culture, you should know this maxim most. When you and your colleagues resigned to protest a non-existent policy, you simply played your faithful part in a destructive cycle that has occurred in our military for years now. But I will not play mine.

For years, Presidents have continually rewarded insubordinate officers with welcoming arms and second chances. Except those second chances turn into third chances, and fourth chances, and on and on. They never end, and the fact that these officers resign to protest, commit insubordination, and so much more, and then are brought back in simply communicates a message to new enlisted that doing those things is in *any fashion* acceptable. Doing so is not okay—at all.

Not only does this culture of toxicity hurt the ability of the Commander in Chief to do his job, it also hurts those who deserve to be hurt least: the enlisted. Surely you understand that individuals at the lower ranks look to their commands for guidance, and thus try to emulate the conduct they witness. If I am to finally put together a Joint Chiefs of Staff whose members understand their role is follow lawful orders without throwing a tantrum in public and resigning—this is also known as “insubordination”—I cannot then at the same time reward the very conduct to which I am trying to put an end.

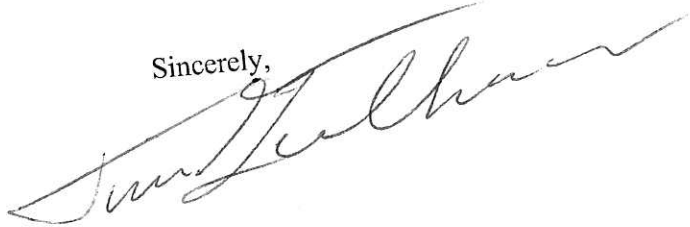
Indeed, just two nights ago, the cycle continued when a new set of officers decided that their opinions mattered more than the orders they received and resigned—and they surely felt secure in doing so because just two weeks ago you participated in a similar affair. Not only did they do that that, though; they also decided that their job description, instead of providing the Commander in Chief with the military advice for which he asks—included giving advice to a congressional committee on the merits of a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff nominee. It was my understanding that the Joint Chiefs of Staff are

apolitical—the only information they should be providing a committee with should be in the form of a required-by-law report or basic statistics or facts about the military's makeup. Perhaps this short story will help you to see why asking me to re-employ you puts me between a rock and a hard place.

It really would be wonderful for me to look the other way and bring you back into the fold; I wish that I could. But, as I said already, actions have consequences. In your case—and in your friends' case, and in the cases of anyone else in the future who may follow in their lead—that consequence is a permanent exclusion from the Armed Forces.

I wish you the best in whatever your new career will be—should you choose to pursue one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sam Donaldson", written in dark ink.