



UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES
BOARD OF REGENTS
4301 JONES BRIDGE ROAD
BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20814-4799
www.usuhs.edu



31 December 2020

The Honorable Christopher C. Miller
Acting Secretary of Defense
4000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-4000

SUBJECT: Proposed Removal of the President, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As the President of the Board of Regents (BOR) of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) and as a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (ASD (HA)), it behooves me to respectfully bring to your attention a highly adverse and most irregular personnel action initiated by Mr. Thomas McCaffrey, the current ASD (HA). In a letter sent to Dr. Richard Thomas - the President of USU - Mr. McCaffrey states his intention to recommend to Mr. Matthew Donovan that he remove Dr. Thomas for a variety of allegations. These allegations all stem from an opinion that Dr. Thomas failed to properly supervise and then punish one of the Deans at USU for supposedly violating Privacy Act statutes when the Dean reported the proven misconduct of a faculty member to the National Academy of Medicine.

I have carefully reviewed both the letter and the underlying foundations, and I find this case to be utterly without merit. As your appointed President of the BOR, I would like to point out several issues and inconsistencies in this action.

1. The misconduct of the faculty member and the actions taken were established long before the Secretary of Defense appointed Dr. Thomas to his position.
2. The measures taken against the faculty member, including his dismissal and the report of his misconduct to the National Academy of Medicine, were discussed by the BOR on several occasions. I would note that Mr. McCaffrey is a member of the BOR and was present during these discussions. He voiced no opposition to the measures recommended.
3. The letter written by Mr. McCaffrey is replete with phrases such as "could have done damage to the reputation of the University," "could have resulted in legal action," and "could have resulted in criminal charges." In fact, none of these "could have beens" actually happened. Indeed, Dr. Thomas, his predecessor Dr. Rice, and the Dean in question acted decisively to ensure that the misconduct of the faculty member was dealt with appropriately and quickly. Far from damaging the University's reputation, their actions served to reinforce the high academic and professional standards that have been the hallmarks of the University since its founding.

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4. The investigation that led to Mr. McCaffrey's recommendation was completed more than one year ago. Yet no action was taken until the eve of the transition of administrations and during the holiday season. At the same time this action was allegedly pending, Dr. Thomas continued to receive high praise in his evaluations prepared and endorsed by the BOR that, again, included Mr. McCaffrey as a full member.
5. The relationship between Mr. McCaffrey and Dr. Thomas has often been one of professional tension as a result of Dr. Thomas' dedication to mission and firm yet always ethical and enlightened defense of the University from those in the budget community who sought its closure or reduction in capabilities. Despite this tension, Mr. McCaffrey repeatedly asked Dr. Thomas to undertake a wide range of missions that went beyond the University, were key in determining the future of the MHS, and were instrumental in the Department's management of the pandemic. This reliance on Dr. Thomas appears inconsistent with the assertion in Mr. McCaffrey's letter that he has lost confidence in Dr. Thomas.
6. The nature of the allegations, the absence of any damage done to the University, the timing of the proposed actions, the significant inconsistencies in the letter and the draconian punishment proposed make me suspect other personal issues are involved.

Finally, I have known Dr. Thomas for more than 10 years, and he is the consummate professional – courageous in war, compassionate in peace, and committed to the defense of the nation. He is a soldier's soldier with an unblemished record of distinguished service, repeated combat tours, and exemplary leadership in multiple command positions throughout the MHS. Under his leadership, USU has consistently demonstrated irreplaceable value to the MHS, to the Warfighter, and to the entire DoD family. He is worthy of the Department's gratitude, not its condemnation.

I thank you for reviewing this proposed action and respectfully request that you not support the dismissal of Dr. Thomas. I would be glad to talk to you about this in more detail.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Woodson

Jonathan Woodson, MD, MSS, FACS
President, Board of Regents
Former Assistant Secretary of Defense
for Health Affairs (2010-2016)