



August 29, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Presidents and Athletic Directors, The University of Texas System
Dr. Vistasp M. Karbhari
Dr. Gregory L. Fenves
Dr. Richard C. Benson
Dr. Diana S. Natalicio
Dr. W. David Watts
Dr. Guy Bailey
Dr. Ricardo Romo
Dr. Rodney H. Mabry

FROM: William H. McRaven 

As most of you recall, last January I sent out a letter asking you to encourage your coaching staff and your players to stand up straight when the National Anthem was played. I requested that the coaches and the players “face the flag and place their hand over their heart as a sign of respect to the nation.”

I made it clear that honoring the flag does not imply that the republic for which it stands is perfect. I said, “Far from it, honoring the flag is our collective commitment that we will constantly attempt to get better as a nation, to improve as a people, and to use the freedoms we have been given to make the earth a better place.”

I spent 37 years defending freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Nothing is more important to this democracy. Nothing! However, while no one should be compelled to stand, they should recognize that by sitting in protest to the flag they are disrespecting everyone who sacrificed to make this country what it is today—as imperfect as it might be.

Those that believe the flag represents oppression should remember all the Americans who fought to eliminate bigotry, racism, sexism, imperialism, communism, and terrorism. The flag rode with the Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th, 10th, 24th and 25th Cavalry and Infantry Regiments. It was carried by the suffragists

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down the streets of New York City. It flew with the Tuskegee Airman of WWII. It was planted in the fields where Cesar Chavez spoke. It marched with Martin Luther King Jr. It rocketed into space on the shoulder patches of women, gays, Hispanic, Asian and African American astronauts. Today, it waves high over the White House. It is a flag for everyone, of every color, of every race, of every creed, and of every orientation, but the privilege of living under this flag does not come without cost. Nor should it come without respect.

The nation and everything it strives for is embodied in the American Flag. We strive to be more inclusive. We strive to be more understanding. We strive to fix the problems that plague our society. But in striving to do so, we must have a common bond; some symbol that reminds us of our past struggles and propels us to a brighter, more enlightened future. That symbol is the American flag.

I would, once again, ask the Presidents and the Athletic Directors to convey my message to your teams. The young student-athletes are future leaders of this nation. By showing respect for the flag, they are making it possible for America to be everything we dreamed it could be.

Thank you.

/whm