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To Whom It May Concern:

On 7 January 2021, I wrote a social media post that attracted the attention of the Minnesota National Guard's (MNNG) Joint Forces Headquarters (JFHQ). After receiving a phone call from my company commander on 9 January 2021, I decided that my public comment warranted a more in-depth explanation that transcended the limited and stifling medium of social media. While I understand that this letter may end up in the garbage can, my conscience dictates that I write and submit it nonetheless. What transpired on 6 January 2021 was an insurrection and attempted *coup d'état* incited by and for the benefit of the President of the United States. The MNNG's silence on this fact is disconcerting. Such silence only emboldens those responsible and we must take immediate action to protect our system of governance from future acts of violence and sedition. Though I am sure there are already ongoing conversations regarding this matter, I conclude this letter with four proposals that I believe will serve as effective starting points for identifying and discouraging rightwing extremism among our ranks.

To be clear: I am writing as someone who as an enlisted soldier has taken an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States and of the State of Minnesota against all enemies, foreign and domestic." A similar oath is required for me to stand before the court as a licensed attorney. Such Oaths committed to popular sovereignty and the principles of free government make me necessarily anti-fascist and thus opposed to any attempts to subvert the democratic process. Consequently, this ideological bias will be reflected in what I have to say. If by submitting this letter I am violating the Uniform Code of Military Justice, I am prepared to accept the consequences of my actions.

- I. ***What occurred on 6 January 2021 was an insurrection and an attempted coup intended to keep the President of the United States in office longer than his duly elected term.***

I feel it necessary to begin by stating what I witnessed last week. After spending half a year spreading disinformation regarding the 2020 presidential election, when the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, lost, he then spent two months making false allegations of widespread voter fraud. Even more, he accused his political opponents of “stealing” the election. Every public claim he made were different—in both substance and scope—than the sixty lawsuits he and his legal team filed with state and federal courts. All sixty lawsuits were thrown out. On 2 January 2021, the President then made veiled threats against Georgia’s Secretary of State, demanding he change that state’s election results. The Georgia Secretary of State refused to do so. On 6 January 2020 when a joint session of the United States Congress met to certify the Electoral College results, the President encouraged his supporters to march on the U.S. Capitol building. The intended purpose of this was to persuade the Vice President and the President’s political allies to disenfranchise millions of American voters, even though there was no way in which this could be constitutionally done. When the President’s supporters marched upon the Capitol, as they were encouraged to do, they broke into the building and entered the halls of Congress with the premeditated purpose of disrupting and even overturning the Electoral College vote. What proceeded to happen was two hours of violence and destruction as Capitol Police and the D.C. National Guard engaged with the insurrectionists in a way that was fundamentally different than how, for example, the MNNG has treated Black Lives Matters protesters throughout the year. By the end of the day, five people died, including one Capitol Police officer who was bludgeoned to death with a fire extinguisher.

As a citizen and as a soldier, I was shaken by what I saw. It is offensive to see a man kick his feet up on the desk of the Speaker of the House while down the hall others marched with the Confederate flag, accomplishing something that not even the Confederate States of the Union could do. When armed insurrectionists later broke into the U.S. Senate chambers, with one going to the dais and shouting “Trump won that election!”, had legislative aides not swiftly taken away the Electoral College ballots, they would have been stolen and destroyed. When these same insurrectionists can be seen in footage armed and wearing military gear with fistfuls of zip ties, it does not take much imagination to see that their intent was to take hostages. Had they captured any of those elected officials who have been the target of racist and misogynistic rhetoric—such as *my* U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar—I have no doubt that they would have physically assaulted and perhaps even murdered her.

There is no other way to describe what happened on 6 January 2021 as anything other than mass insurrection and sedition. That the motivating factor of these insurrectionists was to disrupt and overturn the Electoral College results for the purpose of keeping an elected official in office made this an attempted *coup*. This is true regardless of its failure, the incompetence of its participants, and the lack of effective coordination (though it remains to be seen how much coordination there in fact was). If this happened

anywhere else in the world, we—as citizens and as soldiers—would not hesitate to call it an attempted *coup*. But because this occurred in a nation that views itself as exceptional and was done at the direction and for the benefit of someone who received 74 million votes, we are all suddenly at a loss for words, with many of us scrambling desperately to hide our cowardice in silence whilst abandoning the very principles for which we claim we would give our lives.

What transpired on 6 January 2021 was nothing less than an assault on American democracy. The current sitting President, our Commander-in-Chief, has ended what was a hallmark of our democracy and a 232-year-old tradition, that is: the peaceful transition of power from one Administration to another. While I am certain a few insurrectionists will be charged and convicted of their crimes, I am not optimistic that those who incited the violence—or who have enabled it through their promotion of anti-government, anti-democracy conspiracy theories—will ever be held responsible for their actions. Consequently, this means that we will continue to see—and should even expect in Minnesota—more rightwing insurrections and domestic terrorist attacks in the coming months and years.

History has demonstrated that failed *coups* are often followed by successful ones.

II. *It is disappointing that the MNNG hesitates to call the 6 January 2021 insurrection and attempted coup what it was. The fact this is the case, though, reflects a larger cultural problem in the military.*

Following the failed *coup*, I spent the day grieving for my country—this being after a year of pandemic, social upheaval, and rising political extremism. All of which, as a member of the MNNG, I have experienced and processed in a way that most Americans will not and cannot. So, after a day of processing the President’s *coup* attempt, I was disappointed then, when on 7 January 2021, I saw what was the first—and thus far only—comments by anyone within the MNNG leadership chain regarding what happened. That day, the 2-136 IN (CAB) commander, LTC Joseph Sangano, sent an email to company leadership telling them to remind soldiers of the MNNG’s social media policy. When company leadership complied, it is notable that the policy in question was dated 11 May 2020—that is to say, it had not even been updated since Operation Home Front and the largest MNNG troop activation in state history. Included in the company’s email to soldiers was the battalion commander’s own words:

In light of the timely events occurring on the national stage, ensure we remind the force of the MNNG social media policy. JFHQ PAO has flagged numerous incidents in the last 24hrs where SMs are in violation of this policy given individual social media posts that have been brought to their attention. We must remain apolitical and remind all SMs of their duties/responsibilities as a member of the MN National Guard.

After reading this, the gravity of “the timely events occurring on the national stage” made me feel that I had a moral obligation to say something that would be nonpartisan and consistent with my Oath to the United States Constitution. So, with careful consideration, I posted the following on my personal Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts:

To the Minnesota National Guard:

As both a soldier and attorney, I’ve taken two oaths to the United States Constitution. I take both of these very seriously.

It is not political for me, or anyone else for that matter, to call what happened yesterday an attempted coup inspired by the suggestive and conspiratorial rhetoric of the President of the United States.

You know as well as I do that there are Boogaloo Bois and other anti-government types in our ranks, and so instead of sending out social media etiquette memos, perhaps you should be court-martialing and discharging those who are publicly siding with insurrectionists and traitors to the Constitution.

#mnleg #insurrectionact #insurrection #treason

Sincerely,

Joshua Preston

Within hours of posting this, a staff sergeant in my company notified me that this post was brought to the attention of JFHQ and that I would soon be contacted by my company commander. When my commander contacted me on 9 January 2021, I want to be clear that while it was expressed that there was, among some high-ranking officers of the MNNG, if not a sentiment, a desire, or an order, that I should delete (or at least untag) the MNNG in my post, my commander did not give me a direct order to do so. Such an order would have been illegal, and I would not have complied. In fact, one might argue that for anyone at any level in the chain of command to even express *the desire* to, in any way, diminish the scope of my comments as a citizen exercising his right to free speech in the furtherance of his military and professional oaths is a more political and worrisome position than my post’s original substance.

What now follows may all seem like a disproportionately long discussion regarding what is just a four-sentence response to a three-sentence statement, but this single, facially minor incident is worth expounding upon because it is through the smallest actions—simple gestures, brief exchanges—that we reflect the larger values and norms of our institutions. What is but a short note or an offhand comment carries weight for what is said between the lines, and this is especially true in dominance hierarchies where we are expected to support and replicate those above us (so much so that our advancement depends upon it). Thus, to receive a statement from the battalion commander referring to an insurrection and attempted *coup* as “timely events occurring on the national stage” does not reflect or represent the sentiment of a single man but rather a more-encompassing cultural environment. In fact, I cannot fault the battalion

commander for his words when even the Office of the Secretary of Defense first referred to this insurrection and attempted *coup* as the “First Amendment Protests in Washington, D.C.”¹ We would never engage in these kind of mental and linguistic gymnastics when referring to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor or the 9/11 terrorist attacks—so it is worth asking why this is not only expected but even encouraged among servicemen (as illustrated by the reiteration of the MNNG’s social policy and the fact that my social media post had to be responded to with a phone call from my company commander).

There are many ways to answer this question, and my initial instinct is to discuss what has been a post-9/11 realignment of the Army National Guard within the larger military-industrial complex. Despite the jokes about National Guardsmen being “weekend warriors” who are only activated to fight floods, we exist now to supplement and support the active-duty Army. Because of this, we are trained to operate as though we will be deployed to the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan rather than the streets of our state’s most-populous city, which thus makes us unprepared for addressing domestic conflict, such as civil unrest among our citizens. For example, as an infantryman, I spent 2 ½ years training how to effectively use the M242 Bushmaster in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle but only 2 ½ hours training with a riot shield—and this was only after white supremacists (like the “Umbrella Man”²) set the fires that escalated the protests and after the Minneapolis Police Department blinded multiple protesters with rubber bullets. While I believe this realignment of the Army National Guard is related to what I am about to say, it is a much larger topic than I plan to fully engage with here.

I believe the reason why the MNNG is struggling to call an attempted *coup* an attempted *coup*—and this is reflected in the battalion commander’s comment—is that there is confusion regarding the difference between partisan and political speech. To discourage political—rather than partisan—speech is not only conceptually incoherent but is a way, intended or not, for soldiers to avoid taking positions that may be consistent with our constitutional Oath and yet in conflict with certain partisan positions. The consequence of this is that it predisposes those in positions of power toward silence, creating an ambiguous space in which both soldiers and the public may project their own beliefs and even fears. So long as there is any capacity for rightwing extremist groups to view themselves as acting with the implicit consent or

¹ On 10 January 2020, the following Department of Defense timeline included the language as quoted above. It is notable that on 11 January 2020, when I accessed this file again the language was changed to “Violent Attack at the U.S. Capitol.” At the bottom of the document is an added note that reads: “This document has been updated to more appropriately reflect the characterization of events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th.” See <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/08/2002562063/-1/-1/1/PLANNING-AND-EXECUTION-TIMELINE-FOR-THE-NATIONAL-GUARDS-INVOLVEMENT-IN-THE-JANUARY-6-2021-FIRST-AMENDMENT-PROTESTS-IN-WASHINGTON-DC.pdf>

² Sara Sidner, “Minneapolis police identify ‘Umbrella Man’ who helped incite George Floyd riots, warrant says,” CNN, July 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/28/us/umbrella-man-associated-white-supremacist-group-george-floyd/index.html>.

support of the military, they will continue to do so. And for as long as they are able to plausibly get away with this, we will remain suspect to those being victimized and threatened by these same groups.

III. *The conflation of political and partisan speech encourages a silence that leaves a dangerous and damaging impression among soldiers and the public.*

Those with the power to create policy within the MNNG must acknowledge the conceptual difference between nonpartisan and apolitical speech. To demand of National Guardsmen speech that is apolitical is to demand of them silence. Any discourse pertaining to issue-specific causes (e.g. “The thin Blue Line” or “Black Lives Matter”) or to basic rights (e.g. those outlined in the Constitution’s Bill of Rights) is inherently political in nature. This is because politics is at its core the relationships between people, to our rights and responsibilities toward one another, to the distribution of shared resources. To demand that soldiers be apolitical requires them to be silent on everything from the benign—such as whether people should be required to wear a bicycle helmet—to whether a democratic-republic is a worthwhile system of governance. In fact, it could be argued that it is impossible for we, as soldiers, to maintain our Oath to the U.S. Constitution *without* engaging in speech that could be construed as political.

Instead, when MNNG leadership expects soldiers to behave apolitically, I think what they mean is that they expect soldiers to be *nonpartisan*. I have questions regarding where this line is drawn given National Guardsmen’s status as *citizen*-soldiers, since I know for a fact that there are current officers of the MNNG who, as vocal members of a political party, hold state legislative office. Clearly, this is not as obvious or enforced (or even enforceable) as some would like to believe. Even so, despite these issues, military nonpartisanship is an important principle. The military—or anyone claiming to be acting on behalf of the military—should not be advocating for political parties or candidates. Ever. But as an institution, the military should be clear and consistent in its defense of basic constitutional principles. Among these are principles of popular sovereignty, individual liberty, the rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balances. Whilst remaining nonpartisan, there should simply be some ideological, political positions that we, as soldiers, can unequivocally challenge and disavow—among these, I would propose insurrections and attempted *coups*. Fascism might be another one.

To promote an apolitical—rather than *nonpartisan*—disposition provides a shield behind which we can hide, as individual soldiers and an institution, to avoid taking public positions that might open ourselves to public criticism. During the Minneapolis riots, by avoiding candid discussions regarding institutional racism and our nation’s long history of violence against people of color, we did not elevate the moral compasses of our soldiers *or* the standing of our institution in the eyes of the public; instead, we diminished

both by being associated with police violence against protesters who, among many soldiers, were at the time viewed not as citizens and neighbors but as enemies. Now, by avoiding candid discussions about rightwing extremism and domestic terrorism, we are creating the impression that the timely events that occurred on the national stage were tolerable, if not acceptable, behavior on which the MNNG will take no public position. Such impressions have consequences. The impressions we make matter, and they can either help or handicap our missions down the road.

Was I to publicly state that it's been suggested to me that high-ranking officers in the MNNG JFHQ wanted me to delete and/or untag the MNNG's social media accounts in my public statement, it would create the impression that I am being reprimanded for saying—to put it in the most-simple of terms—that *coups are bad* and insurrectionists should not look to the military for comfort or support. Now, this may not be the intent behind such a request. It may just be public relations in the furtherance of an (unachievable) apolitical professionalism. But imagine what this looks like to millions of Americans who have, over the last year, lost faith and trust in their democratic institutions—both those who feel emboldened to threaten the lives of others and those whose lives are threatened.

In addition to the impression that our silence leaves on the general public, it also creates a chilling effect on soldiers. Our service in the MNNG *by its very nature* demands that we participate in controversies directly affecting our local communities and yet it feels as though all our leaders care about is having a statement printed simply to say that they made a printed statement. This deafening silence—during both the riots and in light of rising, rightwing extremism—is just as damaging to soldiers as it is to our neighbors who worry about their personal safety. Speaking for myself, when I sat down to craft my social media post, I did not expect that within 72 hours I would be sitting down to write a twelve-page explanation of what I know is consistent with my Oath and moral values and *yet* which a part of me still feels is somehow an insubordinate—perhaps even transgressive—act. As a member of the legal profession, I should not be put in a position where I must question whether I behaved inappropriately for calling out what I saw. When I learned that there were MNNG officers who wanted me to delete my post, I experienced a private crisis that required me to reach out to friends and loved ones just so I might be reassured that what I wrote was neither partisan, delusional, nor immoral. As a citizen-soldier, I had to ask for reassurance that it is appropriate to speak out against an assault on our democracy and that military leadership should do more to root out rightwing extremists within our ranks. This is pathetic and shameful. As I write, I should not be worried that I might be threatened with judicial proceedings or retaliation; similarly, was I to publish or share this letter, I should not have to consider whether doing so will jeopardize my personal safety. And yet, these are legitimate concerns.

This brings me to my next point: I feel the need to be concerned about my safety because there is a well-documented and uncomfortable connection between the military and rightwing extremism and violence.

IV. *By adopting an apolitical attitude, we are overlooking the rise of rightwing extremism and the well-documented and present connection between such extremism and past military service.*

Because of the recent perceived and actual failures of our civic institutions, we are living in a socio-political atmosphere where rightwing extremists feel emboldened to engage in insurrection. What transpired on 6 January 2021 was foreseeable, and we should anticipate that with a new, incoming Administration, there will be come similar acts of rightwing violence and domestic terrorism. Thus, as an institution that has for the last two decades committed itself to combating terrorism, the military should be applying the lessons we have learned within the international arena to our own ranks. But to do this first requires the MNNG to acknowledge the well-documented connection that exists between domestic terrorism and military service (if not just the fetishization of military culture).

Domestic terrorist organizations have been around since the founding of the republic—from pioneer-led attacks on indigenous communities to the Ku Klux Klan—and in this century takes on the form of militia and paramilitary movements. Such movements gained more attention following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing orchestrated by Timothy McVeigh, an Army veteran. Following this domestic terror attack, early researchers studying the militia movement found that in the 1990s such groups were motivated by concerns about “a rogue government” and made up of “Gulf War veterans, ardent gun owners, those with less political representation, and populations with a greater propensity for violence.”³ Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) expressed concern that the high number of returning veterans this might serve as a breeding ground for rightwing extremism. In fact, in 2009, DHS published a report warning that

right-wing extremists will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to exploit their skills and knowledge from military training and combat. ... The willingness of a small percentage of military personnel to join extremist groups during the 1990s because they were disgruntled, disillusioned, or suffering from psychological effects of war is being replicated today.⁴

³ Sean P. O’Brien & Donald P. Haider-Markel, “Fueling the Fire: Social and Political Correlates of Citizen Militia Activity,” *Social Science Quarterly* 79/2 (1998), 456.

⁴ Office of Intelligence and Analysis. *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment*. Report. Department of Homeland Security. (2009). <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/rightwing.pdf>, 7.

It is worth noting that this report faced a backlash from rightwing organizations and veterans' groups and that, facing this public pressure, DHS withdrew its report.⁵ Since then, political divisions have worsened, the rhetoric has become more violent, and there now exist online echo-chambers where extremist ideas can circulate without rebuttal. In fact, this is something that even the current Administration has acknowledged. In the DH's October 2020 *Homeland Threat Assessment*, it noted that "racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists—specifically white supremacist extremists—will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland."⁶ It further said that "[v]iolent extremist media almost certainly will spread violent extremist ideologies, especially via social media, that encourage violence and influence action within the United States."⁷ Then in language that will be cited in all future accounts of the 6 January 2021 attempted *coup*, this report anticipated that such extremists would target events related to the presidential election since "[s]ome [Domestic Violent Extremists] have heightened their attention to election- or campaign-related activities, candidates' public statements, and policy issues connected to specific candidates, judging from domestic terrorism plots since 2018 targeting individuals based on their actual or perceived political affiliations."⁸

It is uncomfortable to accept that there is an historic and present-day link between domestic terrorism and past (or present) military service and it warrants more study and consideration among decision-makers and military leadership. I suspect that in addition to basic socioeconomic circumstances, other contributing factors include servicemembers' views of personal exceptionalism, a toxic warrior ethos, and an overeager embrace of the Second Amendment, which from the Founding was always understood as being a means for engaging in active conflict with the federal government. These attitudes sufficiently overlap with militia groups and antigovernment organizations (like the Boogaloo Bois) and provide some explanation why among rightwing extremists there are so many former servicemembers and/or those who fetishize military culture. To be clear: this is not conjecture but something for which there are numerous examples from the last year alone. To cite only a few examples:

- In May, an Air Force Sergeant with ties to the Boogaloo movement was charged in the shooting of an Oakland federal security officer.⁹

⁵ Audrey Hudson, "Report citing veteran extremism is pulled," *Washington Times*, May 14, 2009, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/14/report-citing-vet-extremism-is-pulled/>.

⁶ *Homeland Threat Assessment*. Report. Department of Homeland Security. (2020).

https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020_10_06_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf, 18.

⁷ *Id.* at 17.

⁸ *Id.* at 18.

⁹ Richard Winton *et al.*, "Far-right 'boogaloo boys' linked to killing of California law officers and other violence," *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-17/far-right-boogaloo-boys-linked-to-killing-of-california-lawmen-other-violence>.

- In September, a former marine was linked to a domestic terror plot to attack critical infrastructure.¹⁰
- In October, a former marine with Neo-Nazi affiliations was indicted for conspiring to manufacture illegal weapons. This soldier planned to use his military experience to recruit members for a paramilitary organization.¹¹
- In November, two former marines were among the leaders of the “Wolverine Watchmen” charged in their plot to kidnap the governor of Michigan and publicly execute her. They planned to incite similar attacks on other state governments.¹²

Additionally, regarding the timely events that occurred on the national stage, based on the available information at the time of this writing, there are at least two other high-profile examples of this same phenomenon:

- The woman shot and killed by Capitol Police was an air force veteran and QAnon conspiracy theorist.¹³
- One of the men walking the Senate chamber floor in tactical gear and zip ties was a retired air force reserve lieutenant colonel.¹⁴

There are also additional reports of active service members and off-duty police officers involved in the 6 January 2021 insurrection and attempted *coup*. I am sure their names and roles will soon come to light, and they will be punished and characterized as “bad apples,” as aberrations rather than as representative of something more toxic and dangerous in our culture, both within the military and at-large. It is, and always has been, easier to characterize people as individuals actors rather than embrace the fact that no one operates in a vacuum; to do otherwise would require people in positions of power and influence to take personal responsibility for the norms and values they espouse, either expressly or through the encouragement of their silence.

For as many mandatory briefings as the military has regarding safety, mental health, and sexual assault, there does not exist, to my knowledge, any pertaining to domestic extremism or how military culture may make soldiers susceptible to extremist, rightwing organizations. For every moment that we do not

¹⁰ Jared Keller, “Marine veteran linked to alleged domestic terror plot,” *Task and Purpose*, January 9, 2021, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/marine-corps-domestic-terrorism-plot/>.

¹¹ Tom Foreman, Jr., and Harm Venhuizen, “A modern day SS’: Inside the white supremacy allegations of a Marine, veterans charged in illegal weapons case,” November 21, 2020, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-military/2020/11/21/a-modern-day-ss-inside-the-white-supremacy-allegations-of-a-marine-veterans-charged-in-illegal-weapons-case/>.

¹² Kim Bellware, *et al.*, “Accused leader of plot to kidnap Michigan governor was struggling financially, living in basement storage space,” *Washington Post*, October 9, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/kidnap-plot-whitmer-fox-militia/2020/10/09/ce81751a-0a65-11eb-9be6-cf25fb429f1a_story.html.

¹³ Jeff Mordock, “Woman killed at capitol identified as air force veteran,” *The Washington Times*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jan/6/ashli-babbit-identified-air-force-vet-killed-capitol/>.

¹⁴ Ronan Farrow, “An air force combat veteran breached the senate,” *The New Yorker*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/an-air-force-combat-veteran-breached-the-senate>.

disavow violent, domestic extremism whilst projecting moral clarity and fidelity to the United States Constitution, the longer we project the image of an organization that is comfortable insurrection and antigovernment violence. Our silence in moments of great moral and political crisis undermines both the rule of law and our democratic system. We cannot allow this to continue and it is time we take action within the MNNG.

V. *Changing the culture and addressing rightwing extremism will not be fixed within a generation but it begins with first acknowledging what has happened and then taking the steps to root out rightwing extremism within our ranks.*

The whole purpose of this letter is to provide some explanation and context for my 7 January 2021 social media post. To reiterate: it is a problem that MNNG leadership conflates the concepts of partisan and political speech, which serves as a shield for avoiding public positions that may be consistent with our Oath and yet in conflict certain partisan beliefs. When we remain silent during periods of social upheaval and constitutional crisis, we create a space that the public and current and former servicemembers read into and which appears to reflect some indifference toward domestic terrorism and rightwing extremism. To some our silence implies that we will look the other way when it comes to rightwing violence; to others, it implies that we may someday commit such violence on these groups' behalf. The fact is that even just discussing this letter with those close to me made some of them express genuine concern for my personal safety. All of this because I feel the need to elaborate upon a four-sentence response to a three-sentence comment that characterized insurrection and an attempted *coup* as “timely events occurring on the national stage.”

While the problems I have discussed cannot be resolved with any single approach, I would like to make the following proposals. I believe these may go a long way in reshaping the culture of the military in such a way that we do not become an enabler for rightwing extremism; doing this will also uplift the MNNG's reputation in the eyes of the general public.

- (1) The Adjutant General of the Minnesota National Guard and JFHQ should support and participate in the creation of a commission that includes a diverse representation of soldiers, civilians, and members of the legislature. This commission should be empowered to review JFHQ's documented complaints and actions taken pertaining to the social media presences of Minnesota National Guardsmen. This information will be used to produce a report on the policing of apolitical versus nonpartisan speech and the presence (if any) of rightwing extremism within our ranks. This should be done with the stated purpose of identifying

members and/or sympathizers of rightwing extremist groups including, but not limited to, the Boogaloo Bois, Proud Boys, and QAnon conspiracy.

- (2) Given that multiple individuals were identified as violating the MNNG's social media policy, allegedly including myself, JFHQ should document and publicly state the repercussions these soldiers will face for their actions. Special attention in this process should be paid to those whose social media comments might reasonably be inferred as promoting, encouraging, or otherwise endorsing the 6 January 2021 insurrection and attempted *coup*.
- (3) Commanding leadership from the brigade to the company level should explain to their soldiers in unambiguous terms that what transpired on 6 January 2021 was a rightwing insurrection and attempted *coup*. These same leaders should affirm the conclusions of the Department of Homeland Security's October 2020 *Homeland Threat Assessment*. Any commanding officer who declines or refuses to do so should make their refusal public.
- (4) Brigade-level leadership should hold mass briefings with soldiers under their command regarding the importance of our Oaths to the United States Constitution and the national security threat posed by white supremacy and antigovernment organizations. They should engage specifically with the well-documented history of domestic terrorist groups consisting of former and active servicemembers.

I will not pretend that any of these proposals will prevent the next domestic terrorist attack or assault on our democratic institutions. Instead, I see these as modest steps that will send a very clear message that the MNNG will not tolerate insurrection and/or seditious acts or harbor their supporters. In light of everything that has transpired in the last year, we cannot remain silent to the rightwing extremism within our midst. When the violence we witnessed on 6 January 2021 occurs again in our own communities, what will we say then? That it is just a timely event occurring on the local stage? We owe it to ourselves and the people we serve to do better.

I look forward to receiving a response to this letter regarding the merits of my position, the viability of my proposals, and how I might assist in their fruition.

Respectfully yours,

SPC Joshua Preston

B. Co., 2/136th CAB IN