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May 2, 2018

The Honorable Gregg Abbott
Governor
The State of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Governor Abbott:

Since both of us have served in elected offices for several years, I'm sure you'll agree we sometimes do not get complete or accurate information and/or advice from our staff and advisers. In hindsight, I believe the advice I got, to, "just let matters blow over in the press," was not the best. After reading your letter, I also think you were not fully informed about the issues surrounding my resignation. I'd like the chance to set the record straight.

You claim in your letter I "wrongfully" used taxpayer funds to settle a sexual harassment claim. That is simply not true. Under the 1995 Congressional Accountability Act, 2 U.S.C. § 1415 (a), *"only funds which are appropriated to an account of the Office in the Treasury of the United States for the payment of awards and settlements may be used for the payment of awards and settlements"*. So, the funds used to resolve this claim were appropriated by Congress for this express purpose. Settlements are also approved by House attorneys, the chairman and ranking Democrat of the House Committee on Administration, and the head of the Office of Compliance. Further, early in the process, I offered to settle with my own funds. I was told, however, by lawyers with the Office of House Employment Counsel that would be illegal and unethical. The lawsuit was against my congressional office, not me personally. The way I understood it, my paying personally to resolve a dispute that I believed was totally frivolous could have been considered a bribe to the plaintiff to drop the suit. Therefore, your statement that I "wrongfully" used taxpayer funds is inconsistent with the truth, the opinions of the House attorneys, and Federal law.

As a former Attorney General, I'm sure you understand settling a lawsuit is not an admission of any wrongdoing. It certainly wasn't an admission in my case. The suit was settled by the House attorneys shortly after the bipartisan Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE), which rarely finds in favor of a member, unanimously exonerated me saying, *"there is not substantial reason to believe that Representative Farenthold sexually harassed or discriminated against Complainant"*.

This unanimous bipartisan finding is also missing from your letter and from press reports in general.

I want to make it perfectly clear that there were never any allegations that I ever touched anyone. In fact, while in office, there was never an instance in which I made sexual advances, requested sexual favors or engaged in physical harassment of a sexual nature. I did, however, run a more informal office than some people may have expected from a career politician. That's because I was not and never wanted to be a career politician. Congress needs real people, who speak in everyday language, not political creatures trying to protect their plot within the swamp.

Looking back, I regret allowing the House attorney's 2015 mediated settlement of the suit against my office to move forward. My intent in doing so was to save the taxpayers money and focus 100% on the constituents of the 27th district. The agreed release at the time of settlement made that clear stating, "*The parties believe that the mediator's solution saves the parties, and the taxpayers, significant sums that would be expended in further discovery and/or trial. The parties' settlement expressly provides that both parties deny all liability...*" As a husband and a father of two successful daughters, I would have preferred my day in court to prove my innocence and reclaim my reputation that was destroyed by the media. However, on balance, the needs of the 27th district and taxpayers outweighed my own personal interest. In the end though, this situation and my decision to move forward came at a significant cost to my family, and in particular, my wife and daughters.

Once the OCE investigation was over, the suit settled, and I won re-election in 2016, I assumed this matter was concluded and I could move forward to help President Trump make America great again. The press, however, would not let go. With my unwavering support of President Trump, the #MeToo movement, and the current cut-throat environment I was back under attack.

By December 2017, it became clear that I was becoming a political liability to the Republican establishment in Washington. Speaker Ryan at first said he would stand by me as I had been investigated and cleared unanimously by the bipartisan Office of Congressional Ethics, and he did so at a press conference in mid-December. However, two days later we met again, and he informed me he was facing political pressure for me to resign immediately. He gave me a choice to either resign immediately or retire at the end of my term. I knew Texans needed me as a voice and supporter of Hurricane Harvey relief, so I accepted his offer to announce my retirement, remove myself from the ballot for re-election with the promise I would be able to serve out my term and leadership would work with me on helping with disaster relief.

After voting for and successfully passing the much-needed Harvey Relief funding in late 2017, the House followed up in early 2018 with a 2,300-page, \$1.3 trillion-dollar Omnibus that I refused to vote for. I was appalled at both Republican and Democrat leadership ramrodding this through the House with no time for members to read it and no input from anyone outside leadership. After the Omnibus debacle, House leadership told Republican members that there would be no significant legislation passed by the Senate prior to the up-coming November election. In essence, Congress was essentially shutting down until November as members go back to their districts to campaign for another term in office.

Sadly, even after my December retirement announcement the bullying from many Democrats, the press, and trolls on social media continued. To defend myself from what had obviously become a political witch hunt, I was told that I could be looking at legal fees of between \$250 thousand and half a million dollars, which is significantly more money than I'd earn serving out the remainder of my term. Consequently, over the Easter recess, and after much prayer and reflection, my family and I decided I should retire immediately.

Before I made my decision to leave, I also made sure that individual constituents and our public and private sector entities would still have a voice. The Clerk of the House has taken over operating my office and the red-tape cutters I hired in Corpus Christi and Victoria are still available to help hurricane victims, veterans and people with Social Security, passport, FEMA, SBA, or other Federal government problems. My former Washington, DC office is still open and actively setting up meetings and referring constituents to other Members of Congress with subject matter expertise for legislative concerns.

On a personal note, I am sorry I didn't speak to you in advance about my resignation. Unfortunately, the decision was made only a short time before the announcement and I have found from past experience it is next to impossible for me, even as a Member of Congress and long-time and active Abbott supporter (I even hosted an event for you at my house when you first ran for Attorney General) to get a phone call with you scheduled. I did not want to discuss the matter with your staff for fear of a leak to the press.

I am also disappointed you chose to release your letter to the media before talking to me first. I know you are an honorable man who is above cheap political shots, bullying and kicking someone while they are down, especially a fellow Republican. I'll just chalk it up to bad advice from your staff.

As to the special election, under Texas law it is my understanding that you did not have to call an emergency special election or could have set one to occur simultaneously with the November general election. With the June 30th special election, if there is a runoff, which press reports say would be in late September, the winner will only have 8 legislative days to serve each month in October,

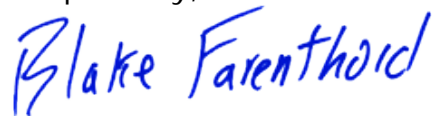
November and December. In my opinion, as well as many other county officials I have heard from, a special election was not warranted and should not have been called. However, that was your decision based upon the advice you were given. Since I didn't call it and don't think it's necessary, I shouldn't be asked to pay for it.

Finally, I'd also like to let you know that I do not intend to end my public service. Before Congress I fought for conservative values on talk radio and I'm confident, with my knowledge of Congress and other parts of the swamp that is Washington, DC there are many other avenues for me to make a difference. I, like many Texans, are tired of cowardly self-serving politicians, the "deep state", the politics of personal destruction, fake news, and mindless opposition to our President and I intend to continue to fight.

I hope to work with you and other conservatives to protect and defend the Constitution, keep Texas red and make America great again.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the events of the last few months, I appreciate your time and consideration and thank you for your service to Texas and America.

Respectfully,



Blake Farenthold