

February 22, 2023

Brother Fain,

We did not have an opportunity to discuss, in depth, your decision to move in a different direction regarding my appointment as your Chief of Staff. Additionally, when we spoke, I did not know that most of the incoming senior staff leadership team was also being let go or resigning. Considering this I wanted to take this opportunity to get back to you with some of my thoughts.

As you know, I had deep reservations about ever playing a role in any UAW administration again, because of my perception that the Administrative Caucus's hold on power, and my belief that it could not be broken, thus the union could never be reformed. I was and remain deeply appreciative of the sacrifices and risks that you and the other reform candidates took to bring about this current change.

My motivation in taking the position of chief of staff was that I believed and still believe that you are a person of principle and integrity, and that your motivation is to move this union back into a position where it fights for our members, working people and the larger community.

I was also impressed with the quality of the individuals that were being assembled as part of your incoming senior staff leadership team, who have been working hard these last few weeks—in a volunteer capacity—to have a successful transition into your presidency. I believe that Susan Pratt, Anna Bakalis, Jonathan Smucker, and Sarah Saheb are all persons of deep commitment, experience, and accomplishment. I assume you also felt the same since you selected them for important leadership positions in your administration.

In the weeks that have passed since you asked me to be chief of staff, I began to have concerns about Chris Brooks' role in the transition and in your administration. These concerns included what I felt was a failure to understand the complexity of our union and the diversity of our membership. I was also concerned by his relative inexperience with launching a strategic plan across such a large and diverse union as ours.

My concerns and the concerns shared with me by the team members listed above are that Chris has assumed a role in the transition and in your future administration that he does not possess the experience or personal maturity to successfully carry out. In a short amount of time, his lack of transparency, his need for control over departmental discussions, his need to control access to you, and his apparent lack of ability to work in a real collaborative manner became apparent. He was not forthright in the beginning about his role post-transition. Then when we saw the job description he wrote for himself, we became deeply concerned. This prompted senior staff to call a meeting with you on Friday. We saw the role that Chris outlined for himself as being in direct conflict with my role as Chief of Staff. We raised our concerns thoughtfully and intentionally, and with respect for what Chris and everyone has contributed to this campaign and process. We felt compelled to talk through these concerns, as we feel they represent a real obstacle to the success of your administration to effect real change and move this union forward.

When I and this group expressed these concerns to you in detail last Friday, we were all appreciative of your taking the time to listen. As we left it, we all agreed to further discussion, with you and Chris to

work through these issues. Unfortunately, the response we received today was that myself, Anna, Sarah and Jonathan were let go, as well as Allison Troy, who was in a non-senior role. Since learning this news, Susan Pratt has resigned.

I know Sue asked you to reconsider your decision and to reset the situation and work through it. I am asking you the same. Although I would not include myself in this request. You should really reconsider your decision in firing the other team members and finding an appropriate place for Chris that utilizes his talents where they are appropriate and could aid in moving forward the reform agenda.

I wish you and everyone who winds up working for your administration best of luck in this endeavor.

Yours in Solidarity,

Joe Rioux

P.S. As you know, we all shared our concerns on Friday, but Jonathan wrote up his notes beforehand and I'm including them again here because I still think they still warrant your consideration.

JMS notes for conversation with Shawn

Personal

First, I just want to very briefly say a bit about where I am coming from in this conversation.

I've been a UAW member for ten years now. I've served as a shop steward and as a head steward for UAW 2865. I care deeply about this union. I've often been resigned about how far below its potential our union is operating. I have been overwhelmed with other political work the past five years, but I have been thrilled to see the reform movement gain momentum.

When Chris called me a few weeks ago to invite me to play a leadership role in a new Comms Department under a new President, I was not looking for work. I'm the Executive Director of a strategy and messaging firm. I make a good living and I love my work.

But the historical opportunity of a rejuvenated UAW—and feeling like my skill set can make a difference in seizing that opportunity—I made the decision to go all in.

I found ways to pause my organization's work and I've been working full-time as a volunteer for these past three weeks, seeking to get us as ready as possible to pull this off.

So where I'm coming from in this conversation—what's grounding me—is a deep commitment to setting up the new administration and the UAW for success. For big wins.

Leadership & Capacity

My biggest hesitation in saying yes initially had to do with the question of skilled leadership and capacity. Basically my question was, "Will we have the skills and capacity needed to really pull this off?" The dangers of a moment like this are many and huge: the possibility of the new administration being effectively hamstrung by deep division and sabotage by our opponents; the possibility of important work falling through the cracks in the transition and it being pinned as a failure on the new administration; the very short window we will have to define the new administration and show not only its vision, but its competence in delivering on that vision.

Over my 25+ years of bottom-up organizing, I've come to find the concept of a *threshold* important. For a big undertaking like this, you have to cross a certain threshold in skilled/savvy/competent leadership—to attract a certain number of aligned, skilled, and trusted folks. And if you don't cross that threshold, the skilled folks that you did get on board might jump ship because they grasp that they are not going to be able to pull it off and they don't want to hitch their boat to a sinking ship.

I started moving to coming on board because I felt optimistic that we are attracting those competent leaders. This was certainly bolstered from my positive experiences these past few weeks working every day with Anna.

Leaders of Color

But I soon became concerned not only with organizing all the skills we need to pull this off, but specifically enough high-level leaders of color.

As we all know, racial division is one of the most damaging weapons the enemies of the labor movement have used to divide the working class. There are too many examples of these tactics working, and of racism manifesting itself destructively in the labor movement. Fortunately, there are also countless examples of working people uniting across race and other differences and overcoming our enemies' divide-and-conquer schemes.

Today's labor movement, including UAW, is racially diverse. It is critically important that our leadership reflects this diversity. I think it is imperative that the new reform leadership is at least as racially diverse as the leadership it is replacing. That means ensuring that top-level leadership positions are held by leaders of color. There are many high-level qualified and visionary leaders of color and it is incumbent upon the transition team to court them.

This has to be a top priority in our hiring and planning. It's the right thing to do. It's also a non-negotiable strategic necessity. I believe that, should we fail in achieving racially diverse leadership at the top—if, for

example, the net outcome of shifts in leadership were to result in fewer leaders of color—it will understandably become a central talking point of our opponents: one that could seriously weaken the new leadership's credibility and that could divide the union over lines of race.

And it's avoidable. It's on us to avoid such a disaster.

Clarity about Chris' Role

Anna and I have taken these concerns very seriously and we've fed a number of leads to Chris. I have become increasingly concerned about senior leadership, Chris included, taking this potential problem seriously enough. Three individuals who I connected to Chris came back with very negative experiences of their conversations. I also became frustrated that both Anna and I were strongly suggesting Bill Fletcher as an experienced and trusted Black labor leader who could bring either temporary or permanent capacity to the transition leadership, and to learn that Chris didn't bring up Bill to either Shawn or Joe.

Just to be clear: I respect Chris. I appreciate that he is the one who reached out to me and to Anna and to many others. It's clear to me that he has worked very hard to get everyone ready to do a very big thing. And I think there's an important role for Chris. But I also think he has some blinders and there are big matters that are well beyond his experience and skillset. That's not meant as a slight to Chris. There are things I'm not good at. There are roles that each of us is not the best person for. But it's my assessment that Chris does not necessarily even see his blindspots. I think the organizational, structural and supervisory work ahead of us is monumental, and I don't even know if Chris has experience ever supervising anyone or more than a handful of people.

The job description that he wrote for himself raises huge concerns for me. It does not look to me like a document that was written by someone with a realistic sense of the capacity it takes to supervise staff. It is too many department heads for one person to supervise. And he doesn't leave it at supervising the department heads but also takes on all hiring decisions for those departments.

Furthermore, this document concentrates more power into Chris' role than the Chief of Staff role. That feels very off.

I think Chris has done a great service by bringing in more people and talking to even more people to get advice. I think you can't run a giant powerful union like the UAW without sharing and delegating power. To pull something like this off, you have to unleash forces that you can influence, but not fully control. If you can fully control everyone you're bringing in, then you're not bringing in the kind of leaders you need. The moment we're transitioning into is going to require different capacities and different skills. Some of those skills are, in my opinion, not in Chris' experience presently. I think helping to birth something new like this and then having to transition and let go of control can be a challenging thing. I get that. But I think Chris needs a role that does help inform the campaign strategy, but that delegates more organizational matters and supervision to people who have those skill sets.

The bottomline for me is that it's become clear to me in the past few days that Chris being in the role that he has outlined for himself will result in key leaders who he and others helped to recruit leaving before we even get to Day One. That would be a disaster. And I think it's one we can avert.

I want to be part of this team. I want to make this moment one for the history books. I want to help reinvigorate the labor movement and win big things. I think we can. But we have to get this right. As much as we respect Chris and what he's done, none of the other competent leaders who I've come to know and trust these past couple weeks are willing to work under him like this. And if we can't keep these leaders—and recruit even more—then we're below the threshold that I'm comfortable with. Again, I think we have a moment right now to correct our course. It's a gift that we're addressing this now rather than after Day One.

I want to note that I do feel uncomfortable about having this conversation without Chris present, but we felt the need to speak freely with you as a first step. I think a next step would be bringing Chris into the conversation and figuring out how to dig in and sort it all out.

Thanks for your leadership and for hearing out our concerns.