

John Henry Eaton to Andrew Jackson, April 7, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY EATON TO JACKSON.

Washington, April 7, 1831.¹

¹ Van Buren says (*Autobiography*, p. 407) that he and Eaton agreed to resign on a certain unnamed day and that Eaton was allowed to antedate his letter of resignation, that it might seem to be the beginning of the break. It was dated Apr. 7 and Van Buren's Apr. II. But Jackson's reply to Eaton was dated Apr. 8 and the letter to White was dated Apr. 9. Unless both these letters were antedated also, Van Buren's statement seems doubtful.

Dear Sir, On Sunday last I communicated to you my desire to relinquish the duties of the War Department, and I now take occasion to repeat the request which was then made. I am not disposed by any sudden withdrawal to interrupt or retard the business of the Office. A short time will be sufficient, I hope, to enable you to direct your attention towards some person, in whose capacity, industry, and friendly disposition you may have confidence, to assist in the complicated and laborious duties of your administration. Two or three weeks, perhaps less, may be sufficient for the purpose.

In coming to this conclusion candor demands of me to say, that it arises from no dissatisfaction entertained towards you; from no misunderstanding between us, on any subject, nor from any diminution, on my part, of that confidence which has ever been reposed in you.

I entered your Cabinet, as is well known to you, contrary to my own wishes; and, having nothing to desire either as it regards myself or friends, have ever since cherished a

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determination to avail myself of the first favorable moment, after your administration should be in successful operation, to retire. It occurs to me, that the time is now at hand, when I may do so, with propriety, and in proper respect to you. Looking to the present state of things, to the course of your administration, which, being fairly developed, is before the people for their approval or condemnation, I cannot consider the step I am taking objectionable; or that it is one, the tendency of which can be to affec[t] or injure a course of policy, by you already advantagiously commenced, and which I hope will be carried out to the benefit and advancement of the People.² 19

² It was Jackson's idea that Hugh L. White, senator from Tennessee, should succeed Eaton, who would step into the vacant senatorship thus created. White's refusal to enter the Cabinet defeated this hope. Eaton then came out as a candidate for senator against Felix Grundy in 1832, but in this race he was defeated. In 1834 he was appointed governor of Florida, then a territory, and in 1836 he went to Spain as minister. Returning in 1840, he came out as a Whig, much to the disgust of Jackson's old friends. Maj. W. B. Lewis, writing to his daughter Mary Pageot, Apr. 2, 1846 (see N. Y. Pub. Lib., Lewis MSS.), had this to say: "I am not at all surprised, my dear daughter, at what you say about Mr. Eaton. I have thought ever since he returned from Spain that he would kill himself drinking or perhaps 'blow his brains out'. I received from him, not long ago, a very curious letter which indicates some derangement in the upper story, but still he has some method in his madness."

Tendering my sincere wishes for your prosperity and happiness; and for your successful efforts in the cause of your Country

I am very truly Your friend