

5-20-1954

Correspondence, John C. Stennis, J.M. Tubb, May 21, 1954

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PHILIP K. ALLEN, CHIEF CLERK

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

May 20, 1954

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
DeKalb, Mississippi

My dear Friends:

For some time I have been deeply concerned at the prospective outcome of the school segregation cases before the Supreme Court which finally rendered its decision Monday that swept aside five of its own previous decisions, 17 Lower Federal Court decisions, 57 State Supreme Court decisions, 17 State Constitutions, and held that a State law requiring separate schools for the races was invalid. There isn't a chance that the Court will change this ruling and the only way to overrule it is by constitutional amendment being adopted by 36 States, which just will not be done.

We must face this greatest problem that our generation in the South has been confronted with and exercise caution and common sense. In order to preserve the bloodstream of our own race, we cannot afford to put the children of both races in the same schools, but at the same time I do not favor abolishing the public school system except as a very last resort. To do so will, I believe, cause the certain and rapid decline of educational standards except for those that are able to afford the very best private schools. Our middle income and lower income groups of white children will soon find themselves without adequate educational opportunities. My purpose is to preserve, if possible, and I know it will be your purpose, a public school for that group. Of course we are entirely willing for the Negro children to have better schools, and want them to have such.

As I see it, our chance to keep the public schools is to have the leaders of the white race who are really interested in education and the leaders of the Negro race of the same type, agree at the county level on a voluntary plan where each would have a public but separate school for the children of their own race. I believe there is a good chance for such a plan to be worked out in Kemper County and other similarly situated counties that would last for perhaps a quarter of a century. If no satisfactory plan can be worked out in some counties in our State, then we could have a county option on abolishing the public schools for those counties, if they saw fit, and other counties could continue at least for a good number of years under the voluntary system.

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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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I believe that you and other trustees of Kemper County would be rendering a great service if you would have a frank and firm discussion with the Negro leaders on such a plan. Make it clear to them that the Federal Government is not going to provide them with school buildings, with teachers, nor with transportation, but that all this must come from State and local taxes that they alone cannot impose. I believe that you can make it clear, and that they will understand that they cannot "go it alone", and that the organized groups of paid agitators cannot put on tax levies that will support their schools. I believe they will clearly see what they already know, that it will be far better for all concerned if the white and colored people work together and plan together for a system that is satisfactory to both groups, and that this is absolutely the only way for their children to have a good-quality public school. In return, they will be encouraged by your pledge to support a program at Jackson and at the county level that will give them adequate buildings, teachers and transportation.

I think that you can emphasize to them that the decision is theirs, and unless satisfactory plans can be worked out, you will be forced to throw your influence toward abolishing the public school and everyone will have to shift for themselves.

You will fully understand, I know, that this letter is merely observations and suggestions based on long thought on the subject, as well as consultation with other Senators from all over the South. Unless it becomes absolutely necessary, I am strongly opposed to the sentiment in Mississippi that wishes to quickly abolish the public schools and leave every child to more or less shift for himself. Such a plan falls hardest on the white children than on anyone else.

Even though this Supreme Court decision may be a year or two years or even three years in going into effect in Mississippi, I believe it will be a great mistake to ignore this question and wait until we are prodded into having to do something. We should actively start making plans now, and to this end I believe that you should start considering it.

With good wishes and appreciation to each of you, I am

Your friend,

John Stennis
United States Senator

RECEIVED

MAY 24 1954

WASHINGTON



State of Mississippi

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

JACKSON

J. M. TUBB
SUPERINTENDENT

May 21, 1954

Honorable John C. Stennis
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Stennis:

I deeply appreciate your sending to me the opinions of the Supreme Court on the cases involving segregation. I have read these reports with a great deal of interest. I appreciate talking with you about this important matter over the telephone a few days ago. It is our sincere hope that we can work out our problems without too much trouble. I feel that our Negro educators will work with us in any way.

It seems to me that to abolish the public schools in any state would be a grievous matter. I cannot contemplate what would happen if we should resort to this measure.

Please keep me informed as to what is being done about this matter from time to time in the National Capitol.

Your friend,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. M. Tubb".

J. M. Tubb
State Superintendent of Education

JMT/bws

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PHILIP K. ALLEN, CHIEF CLERK

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

May 21, 1954

Personal & Confidential

[REDACTED]
West Point, Mississippi

Dear [REDACTED]

This letter is personal and confidential.

I feel that the burden of this Supreme Court Decision falls heavier on Mississippi than on any other State. I deeply resent it, but at the same time I feel that an attempt at complete defiance will be a complete mistake and I do not want us to abolish the public school system except as a last resort because we can see that over the years it would be the poor white children of the middle and lower income groups who would suffer. Those of that middle group are the backbone of our form of government.

I think that in each county we shall just have to use some common-sense coercion, which in the final analysis is what we have been doing all the time anyway with reference to such matters as voting and unofficial residential zoning, etc. It seems to me that a group of trustworthy white citizens from the county at large whom the negroes trust should meet and decide on a plan of unofficial separate education at the county level, with the plan including of course good schools for the negroes of equal or virtually equal status. Then a representative group of negroes from the county at large could be called in and the matter put before them for a decision, with a pledge to work with them on such a plan to see that local taxation was maintained and State support was provided for their schools. They could be told that this was the plan whereby they could work together; but that if this plan were not satisfactory, it would be everybody for himself, and that the Federal government was not to propose to build them a school and provide transportation.

I just believe that our negro educational leaders in the first place, and the others who have common sense, will be eager and anxious to adopt such a plan. I think they should be warned that the agitators will be among them and that the NAACP will be sending them letters and speakers, but that that group could not raise tax money for school purposes.

This conclusion is not just my own thinking, but is also the thinking of a great number of down-to-earth Southern Senators here, including men like Harry Byrd. I feel that any legal subterfuge is doomed to eventual failure because the Opinion of the Court is applauded throughout all areas of the nation except the South and has gotten into our international relations in a big way. Cablegrams and messages of commendation are coming in to the State

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Department and to the President from all over the world.

As I say, we have been using coercion all the time anyway and in a dressed-up form, coupled with some common sense and the necessities of the occasion, it will work again - at least, I believe, for quite a number of years.

With fond good wishes, I am

Your friend,

John Stennis
United States Senator

Air Mail