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Letter, John C. Stennis to Hugh White, June 4, 1954

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37
United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

June 4, 1954

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear Governor [REDACTED]

I want to commend you for your serious and down-to-earth approach to the grave problem of our school pattern from here on out. I think the people of Mississippi approve your approach and I base this upon the contacts that I made in Mississippi last weekend, which included on-the-ground conversations with the people in West Point, Macon, Columbus, DeKalb, (including here a countywide meeting of 25 interested citizens), Meridian, Laurel, Richton and Hattiesburg. In all of these places I found strong sentiment among the thinking people against abolishing the public school system, except as a very last resort after all other alternatives had been exhausted, because it is realized that this will really solve no problem but will create many new ones of a most serious nature. I believe that only a few private schools could operate successfully and there would be a general deterioration of education within our State and a general exodus of many of our most capable teachers.

Along with this same sentiment, I found a great deal of serious thought among the leaders at the county level who are thinking in terms of taking the initiative and leadership and working out something with the negro leaders that will continue their school development program and at the same time have separate schools, more or less by common consent. I think the main point there is that our negroes are bound to realize that they do not raise the tax money that is necessary to support public schools and that their only plan of progress has to be a plan carrying separate schools for each race.

It seems to me that Governor Talmadge is making a serious mistake in advertising his non-compliance with the Supreme Court decision, making it a crusade of defiance. We are not going to comply with the Supreme Court decision of putting whites and blacks together, but the least we advertise that fact, the better. I believe that we should firmly let our colored friends know that we shall actively assist them in any program of better schools for them, and that the schools will operate as before, separately. We must see to it that this policy of non-conformity is guided by the law-abiding element of our people.

Hon. Hugh White - #2

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Our negroes will be subjected to tremendous pressure from outsiders who would lead them. As I see it, we must beat these "would-be" leaders to the draw and the results will be in our hands because most of the negroes will look to us first for leadership and most of them are our natural friends. What the negro wants is some kind but firm leadership and some help to get better schools. He is, I think, entitled to both.

I am not presuming, of course, that I could add anything to your knowledge of this subject, but am merely giving you the results of my contacts during my visit to Mississippi, where I sought contacts with thinking people regarding this subject; and at the same time, I am giving you reflections gained from contacts here.

With best wishes for your continued welfare, I am

Sincerely yours,

John Stennis,
United States Senator

cc: R. D. Morrow

jcs/eh

chm