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Letter from John C. Stennis, March 15, 1954

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32 School Segregation
United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

March 15, 1954

[REDACTED]
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear [REDACTED]

As I advised you some time ago, what little rumors, and they are purely rumors, that I have heard emanating from the Supreme Court recently have not been good. There is another rumor here that the four-week period announced by the Court when there would be no arguments and no opinion days, meant that they had reached an agreement and were preparing the various parts of their majority opinion. Of course this is just a rumor. With you, I had hoped that the decision day would at least be extended beyond your current legislative session if the decision was going to be adverse to us. This would give time for cool heads to get together and study the opinion and map out a possible course.

I want to make this point: Should the Supreme Court declare segregation illegal, I still believe there are many counties in Mississippi, including your own and my own, in which the white people and the colored people could meet and work out a plan satisfactory to both, and that this agreement plan would perhaps work for 15 or 20 or 25 years in many of these counties. For this reason, even if we were driven to abolishing the public schools in some counties of the State, I think that if any amendment is submitted to the people it certainly ought to beg the question of local option in each county. This would give the people in various parts of the State and in the various counties a chance to work out something, and if no satisfactory plan could be adopted then we could vote out the public schools, as we would still have, for some time at least, control of our elections. To have a mass abolishment of our public schools in Mississippi before any alternate plan is thought through and worked out is bound to cause a very material deterioration of our educational system that will affect 75 to 85% of the white children of the State, and of course would be one of the worst possible things that could happen to the Negro children, insofar as getting real educational training is concerned. I know of your deep interest and anxiety about this matter and feel that you will be one

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who will really put your shoulder to the wheel and very materially aid in working out something constructive, but you must have time in which to accomplish things.

Let me hear from you from time to time, and if I can ever be of any service, you know it will be a pleasure, and a special one.

With very best wishes to you and yours, I am

Your friend,

John Stennis,
United States Senator

ghm/eh