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Correspondence, John C. Stennis, February 24-March 10, 1969

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Betty
Honorable John C. Stennis
United States Senator
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

February 24, 1969

Dear Senator Stennis:

I do not think President Nixon is living up to his implied campaign obligations to take a softer line towards the South and it's school desegregation problems. The President appears to be contradicting himself.

I think the Freedom of Choice plan offered by Southern schools is the best course for the South to take.

HEW is out-of-order in cutting off funds to several Southern schools. please see if you can talk some sense into HEW and Justice Department officials.

P.S.

Congratulations on your new Committee chairmanship.

Sincerely yours,

Route 2

Starkville, Mississippi

39759

JOHN C. STENNIS, MISS., CHAIRMAN

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

T. EDWARD BRASWELL, JR., CHIEF OF STAFF
CHARLES B. KIRBOW, CHIEF CLERK

March 10, 1969

Mr. [REDACTED]
Route 2, [REDACTED]
Starkville, Mississippi 39759

Dear [REDACTED]:

This will acknowledge your very fine letter which I have read with the deepest interest. I share your concern about the harsh actions taken by the federal government against our schools.

There has not been any matter which has come up in the Senate, the Courts or elsewhere, which has troubled me more. Even after the 1954 Supreme Court decision, we were able to defeat, for ten years, Congressional action by the use of extended debate in the Senate, but finally they were able to obtain the two-thirds vote necessary to cut off debate and passed the Civil Rights Bill which included the provision for desegregating our public schools. Out of one hundred votes in the Senate, when the final showdown came we received only nineteen votes, which represented the votes of Senators from our deep South states.

At the time the legislation was enacted, however, we were able to include a provision that desegregation did not mean the assignment of students to schools in order "to overcome racial imbalance". We felt that this afforded our schools some protection but, of course, we opposed the entire bill from start to finish. Unfortunately, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare took the position that their guidelines were in accordance with Constitutional requirements as announced by the Supreme Court in 1954 and not to overcome racial imbalance. Of course, this is a very thin line and one which we disagree with wholeheartedly, but the Courts have upheld this interpretation.

I took this matter up repeatedly with President Johnson and am taking it up with President Nixon. Frankly, we are keenly disappointed that the new administration has not taken any more favorable attitude. We had been led to believe that President Nixon would take a more realistic attitude and would give us some relief from the harsh and

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Mr. [REDACTED]
March 10, 1969

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punitive guidelines and the action taken by the previous administration. The statements which he made during his campaign offered considerable encouragement but, unfortunately, the action taken thus far has not changed anything. In my opinion, the people voted for a change in the matter of schools, as well as in the matter of other areas, and I am keenly disappointed that thus far no change in the matter of schools has been forthcoming.

I assure you that I share your deep feeling and I will certainly continue to do everything I can to try to protect our schools from those who seem determined to force integration upon us at all cost, even if they destroy our public schools in the process. I think it is a shame and a disgrace that there are those who would push for integration at all costs without any interest whatever in a proper education for our children.

I will continue to work with others here who feel as I do and we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts in behalf of our schools and the cause we know to be right.

With kindest regards, I am

Your friend,

John Stennis
United States Senator

JS:cd