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Letter from John C. Stennis, March 12, 1965

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

March 12, 1965

Personal and Confidential

██████████
HOMWOOD

Laurel, Mississippi

Dear ██████████:

First, as a citizen of DeKalb and Kemper County I want to tell you how very much interested I am in the fact that ██████████ has in its plans the opening of a branch plant at DeKalb. I am sure you have already had a report on the attitude of the people there and the welcome your Company has already received.

Since my return to Washington January 1st I have made many contacts here, both in and out of the government, concerning the threatened boycott of Mississippi products. I have personally contacted members of the President's staff on every phase of the problem, and I have personally conferred more than once with the Vice President who, as you know, has contacts with many groups, including the labor organizations. I have written the President of the United States a long letter on this problem and also have mentioned it to him personally. I have also sought contacts with the business world both in the East and in the Mid-West. Through these contacts and other methods, I have tried to learn the attitude of officials of the Federal government here, organized labor and some of the negro associations and groups.

All of the Federal officials are very much concerned about this problem, not solely from the standpoint of Mississippi but also from the standpoint of the possibility of the spreading of such a movement to other States and the natural reaction of a reciprocation which could cause the beginning of a recession. Labor leaders, business leaders and others have the same concern, and all groups have shown some activity in discouraging and restraining such a movement. Of course there are differences of opinion as to what to do and how much to bring the question of a boycott out in the open.

I give you the foregoing as background to the conclusion which I have now reached in that I feel like this entire matter has now reached its peak - that it has receded and that the crisis has now passed. I find that the talk has died out and that in places where some effects had been felt or shown the movement has receded and that, in fact, it has now reversed itself. For instance, when I went to St. Louis a little over a month ago, I found that it was true that the City Board had issued an unofficial order saying that the City would not buy any more products manufactured in Mississippi. Three weeks later, however, that order was in effect officially rescinded and a resumption of purchases was made and continues, as I understand.

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Of course I have not been in any direct contact with Martin Luther King or anyone speaking for him on this, but my information is that he has been made to understand the two-edged sword that this could be and that he has abandoned his plans. You will recall that it was while he was in Oslo that he made his first announcement as to a boycott. Of course we all know that he is now tied up in his plans at Selma, Alabama, and he has a lot of nationwide support in his movement there. I believe that he will stay with something where he does have such nationwide support and is apparently successful rather than start flying the boycott flag where he will find a lot of opposition and division.

I am giving you a report on this matter because I know it is naturally on your mind and that it is a matter about which you are greatly concerned. I hope that you will let me be of any assistance that you can in this matter as well as on any other matter, and that you will write me on any point or phase wherein you think I might be of some assistance.

I am vitally interested in the people of my home county of course and I will strongly support in every way that I can any plant or establishment you locate there. Having been born and reared in Kemper County and having lived there all of my life, I feel that I know the people. I can guarantee you the utmost cooperation on the part of the people there, as well as superior and high quality workmanship from your employees there. Further, I feel that our people there have a lot of gumption and common-sense and that they are not going to follow a radical course in connection with any phase of the racial problem which of course confronts the whole South. Certainly my stand and whatever influence I have will consistently be for law and order, and I have absolute confidence in the people of Kemper County on this score.

I feel that I have thoroughly gone into the matter of this boycott fully at the Federal level. Should anything get started in the future, I feel that the whole weight of the Federal government will be thrown behind stopping any such movement and fully exposing the futality and the self-destruction of those who attempt or try to follow such a plan.

I would have written you earlier and immediately after learning of your interest through our mutual friend, Mr. C. W. Todd, but I have wanted to touch many bases in order to give you a complete report and, too, the trend has been definitely favorable.

I strongly hope that you will continue your plan to locate a branch plant at DeKalb. Hoping to hear from you and with warmest good wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

John Stennis
United States Senator

JS/11
Air Mail
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