

15 March, 1965

Hon. Jeffrey M. Cohelan  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

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MAR 17 1965  
JEFFREY COHELAN  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Dear Sir:

Recent events in Alabama have compelled me to write a letter to someone in Washington. I am addressing it to you, inasmuch as I am a lifelong resident of your district and you are my Representative, the fact that I have voted for your opponent in the last four consecutive congressional elections notwithstanding.

This is not merely another protest against last week's police brutality in Selma. I witnessed that infuriating episode on the TV newsreels, and deplore it as much as anyone. It is rather a protest against the almost nation-wide reaction to this isolated act of brutality and to the savage murder of Reverend Reeb that followed; therefore I hope you will not simply file it into your pile of "We protest Selma Brutality" letters, which by now must be enormous, but will give it your consideration.

Yesterday's newspapers carried headline stories of President Johnson's proposal for a new voting rights bill that will empower the federal government to determine, in the interests of "uniformity", the voting qualifications of the citizens of the sovereign states. The widespread support for this bill is the reaction against which I am protesting. I protest it because it is a truly "extremist" attempt to solve the problem of Alabama, it is in no one's best interest, except possibly Lyndon B. Johnson's; moreover, it is brazenly illegal.

As the President stated in his recently televised speech, the 15th Amendment to our Constitution prohibits denial of the right to vote to any citizen on account of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Further, the 19th prohibits denial of the franchise on account of sex, the 24th outlaws the poll tax, and the 14th assures all citizens the equal protection of the law. The President is quite correct, and any high school civics student ought to know it. Beyond these specific exceptions, however, the rights to qualify citizens' eligibility to vote are reserved, along with all other rights not specifically specified in the Constitution, to the individual sovereign states. Any high school civics student ought to know that, too, but it appears that Mr. Johnson and many other Americans do not.



The present crisis in the South has come about because voting registrars have violated these fundamental laws, through fraud and chicanery, for the past ninety five years, and because the Federal Government has failed to enforce them. The solution to the crisis lies in the adherence to laws already long in effect, not in the passage of new and illegal ones.

It is perfectly legal and desirable that the individual sovereign states establish voter qualification regulations that bar the polls to illiterates, psychotics, criminals, non-residents, or children. It is not desirable that any fool, of whatever race, need only make an X on the registrar's list in order to be allowed to vote. Voters should be required to have some degree of intelligence, and the right to determine how much is reserved exclusively to the individual states.

President Johnson has acted far beyond his authority in proposing an outrageous illegal usurpation of Federal power. He has stated that every citizen must have the right to vote; it appears not to matter to him whether or not he can read his ballot. No doubt he is still irate that Alabama and a few other Southern states precluded a clean sweep for him in last year's election. His proposal lends evidence to the charges of some of his opponents that he is indeed a power-hungry man.

Passage of his proposed bill will make him a bigger carpetbagger than reconstruction days ever knew.

I realize there is little chance that you will risk loss of his patronage by voting against his measure. I also realize the bill is certain to pass, and that there is not the remotest chance that the Warren Court will then do its duty and strike it down. Still, I urge you to vote neither on the side of the lawless racists in power in Alabama, nor for the equally lawless mobs of Communist-inspired beatniks, bums, creeps, dupes, etc, who are on parade all over America inciting riot and insurrection. Vote instead for the rule of law and order, and vote no on this abomination.

On other matters, I have admired your support of the President's Viet-nam policy. Last night I listened to Radio Moscow via short wave praising a recent speech by Senator Morse. It was most disgusting.

There is no substitute for Victory.

I also strongly urge the defeat of "Medicare", and passage of "Eldercare" in the coming session of Congress.

With apologies for bad typing (my own), I remain your faithful constituent,



M.D.



PC/Ch

Judson  
Voting Rights

March 18, 1965

Doctor [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Piedmont, California

Dear Dr. [REDACTED]:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Voting Rights Bill. I appreciate having your frank and candid opinion. I also am glad to know that you approve of some of my positions.

The 15th Amendment to the Constitution, as do many other Articles, begins with a general provision -- in this case that the right to vote "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of servitude." This general provision is then followed by a second enabling section empowering Congress to enforce this Article by appropriate legislation. It is on this basis that the President has proposed and the Congress is considering the present voting measure.

As President Johnson made amply clear in his Message to Congress this last Monday, any State can avoid action by the Federal Government if it acts promptly to insure that none of its citizens are denied the right to vote and the full exercise of their citizenship, and this is, of course, the clear purpose and intent of the Constitution.

I appreciate knowing of your concern and can assure you that the Constitutionality of this proposed legislation is being very carefully reviewed by the Congress. I am also sure that it will subsequently be fully and adequately tested in the Courts. Incidentally, I discuss this issue on television with Congressman Emanuel Celler, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee on Monday over Station KTVU, Channel 2, Oakland at 10:00 a.m. I think you will find it interesting and informative.

Sincerely yours,

Member of Congress

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22 March, 1965

Hon. Jeffrey M. Cohelan  
Congress of the United States  
Washington, D.C.

JEFFERY COHELAN  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

MAR 27 1965

Dear Sir:

I am most appreciative for your having taken the time to answer my letter of March 15 concerning the Voting Rights Bill in such a prompt and courteous manner.

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I listened to President Johnson's televised speech only a few minutes after I had mailed that letter. It was indeed a noble appeal in behalf of a fundamentally righteous cause that I believe all Americans of good faith can support. It further caused me to regret some of the rather intemperant remarks I made in my original letter, for which I hereby apologize.

I persist in my belief that the Voting Rights Bill as he presented it is an illegal outrage to our Constitution and is not in the best interests of that righteous cause. I again respectfully appeal to you to vote NO.

Looking forward to your TV show this evening, I remain:

Sincerely Yours,



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