

[REDACTED]
Stanford,
California
February 1, 1966

The Honorable John M. Williams
The United States Senate
Washington,
D.C.

REC'D FEB 4 1966

Dear Senator Williams:

I am from Wilmington but a student at Stanford University. I was on Senator Bogg's staff last spring and met you at that time. I would like to report that the protest at the universities in California is "for real". It can no longer be written off as a group of misfits looking for a cause to rally around. While the beards and sandals do remain, they are joined by an increasing number of responsible, informed professors and students. I do not have time to go into a full discussion of the complex issues of Vietnam with you here, but I would like to make several points:

(1) I feel completely frustrated when I observe that Congress, supposedly our protection against unchecked presidential power, has in effect given the President a free hand to follow an admittedly debatable policy. I do not feel that Congress is acting as a responsible representative of the interests of its constituents.

(2) I am sick and tired of hearing Dean Rusk's oversimplified version of what the situation really is. Communism is not some great monolithic force to which we can attribute all the evils in the United States. Ho Chi Minh has been in the past an independent, Tito-like leader, and has not been a puppet of the Chinese. If we continue to follow our present policy we will accomplish the very thing that we fear; we will force Ho to move ever closer to the Chinese.

(3) I am disgusted by reports that we are preserving the freedom of the people of South Vietnam. South Vietnam was ripe for subversion from the North because of the widespread discontent with Diem's tyranny. The Vietnamese have been fighting incessantly for twenty years. What they want is really peace, though it is currently against the law to favor peace in Saigon. The authorities in guerrilla warfare say that it will take us at least seven years to win the war. Who can possibly benefit from seven more years of fighting?

I urge, Senator Williams, that the Senate make some attempt to assert itself. The Senate's unwillingness to broach the subject of Vietnam has severely damaged its prestige even among the people who favor our policy in Vietnam. I do not want to accept the view that the constitutional role of Congress is anachronistic. Please do not force me to do so.

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L. For Rel
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February 16, 1966

[REDACTED]
Stanford, California

Dear [REDACTED]

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of February 1, 1966, and your comments with regard to the manner in which the Johnson Administration is conducting our foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

I have read your letter with much interest and can certainly understand the feeling of frustration that you, along with millions of other Americans, are feeling. Such a feeling is widespread throughout the country, I am afraid, and only seems to point up the complexity of the issue and how difficult it is to find and implement solutions to the problem.

I do, of course, receive a great deal of mail on this matter, mail which is not greatly different in content to yours. But missing in all of them is any well thought out solution, any serious recommendation for solving the problems we face--whether they be simply winning a military war or addressing ourselves to the more basic and longer term problems of Southeast Asia. It is, for example, no solution simply to complain of present policy and express a desire to see the war ended. I am sure that view is shared by everyone, including the President, who certainly stands to gain nothing by any escalation of the war.

The problem faced by the Administration--and in recognizing this I do not mean to imply blanket endorsement of the Administration's actions--necessarily goes beyond the wistful versions of what the world might ideally be, and instead is the very practical one of what do we do tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow? Frankly, I do not have the answer, nor does anyone else with whom I have talked or to whom I have listened.

February 16, 1966

The Senate right now is listening to witnesses--most of them opposed to the Administration's policy in some form--and to some degree the hearings may prove to be worthwhile, in that they are directing greater public attention to our present involvement, even though they are not producing any surfeit of solutions.

You speak of the constitutional role of the Congress in foreign affairs, but the constitutional role of the Congress is at best a limited one, the conduct of our foreign affairs being essentially vested in the Executive Branch of the Government. While we may make our thoughts known in various ways--and many members of Congress have constantly done this--the President is under no obligation to accept such freely-given advice. With this action we may agree or disagree, but the fact remains no obligation exists.

What this comes down to is simply this: while we may not, as individuals, support or fully support a particular foreign policy of the administration in power, it must be recognized that foreign policy cannot simply be conducted by referendum. Both the Congress and the people, as individuals and as groups, must continue to be free to express their thoughts, desires, hopes, and recommendations, but when the moment of decision-making arrives, the responsibility for that decision rests squarely in the White House and on its principal occupant.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN J. WILLIAMS

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