



United States Senate

critical - voting rights bill

may 14, 1965

Dear :

First of all, let me apologize for the excessive delay in responding to your letter. We have been literally covered up with correspondence and I am having some difficulty in keeping current while at the same time performing my committee and floor duties as well as the chores of the minority leadership. I hope you have not been inconvenienced.

I can well understand your interest in the voting rights bill and I think it is essential to point out what it does and what it does not do. It does not abolish literacy tests and it does not abolish poll taxes. It does prohibit a state or subdivision from using either literacy tests or poll taxes as a means whereby the rights of citizens to vote is abridged or denied because of race or color. This is precisely the right assured by the Fifteenth Amendment.

We deal with a national problem and with the matter of insuring domestic tranquility and equality and fair treatment for a large segment of our people. At one time the problem was ignored but it can be ignored no longer and there must be a decent, reasonable and equitable solution.

This is not a case of merely going along with the tide but instead is a question of facing up to the realities of the present day world as evidenced by a considerable volume of testimony and facts indicating discrimination in certain states with respect to voting rights.

The chief law officer of this nation should not be compelled to try to solve this problem a case at a time and after pursuing first one discriminatory incident and then another for two or three years through the courts, to have to start all over again. If we were to rely on this remedy, our great, great grandchildren would never live long enough to see a solution of the problem.

The enclosed statement may be of interest to you.

With every good wish,

Everett McKinley Dirksen