

EDITOR'S MAILBOX

April 16th, 1968

The Voice
Las Vegas, Nevada

Gentlemen:

I am enclosing a copy of the specific demands which were made to Governor Laxalt in Reno on April 7th for action in a special session of the Legislature on civil rights problems. We in the northern end of the state have not heard enough echoes from the south regarding this request for a special session. I am therefore writing you more details on the reasons behind this request in the hope that you will be able to stimulate some more support for action in the Las Vegas area.

We believe that the civil rights problems of this state are too urgent to wait for the normal legislative process. If a bill should pass at the 1969 regular session, it traditionally would not go into effect until after July 1st, then it would take several more months to put it into operation. This means we would be a year-and-a-half from any meaningful action in the ordinary course of events.

FAIR AND OPEN HOUSING. The first matter we wanted brought up in a special session was fair and open housing. We believe there is a need for specific state laws now to implement federal legislation to give fair housing to all citizens, regardless of race, creed, color or national origin.

Housing can certainly be proved to be a set pattern of discrimination in Nevada. Furthermore, it handicaps the Negro owner in the handling of his real estate. The Negro population in this country is about 11 per cent, and Las Vegas is now near the national average. On the Westside in Las Vegas where new homes have been purchased by Negroes, they are restricted to selling to 11 per cent of the market because they can sell only to other Negroes. This means that the Negro home is off bounds for 89 per cent of the population. This is like being able to sell an automobile on one street of a city. The present propaganda from real estate brok-

ers and loan and finance companies discourages whites from selling to Negroes or buying from Negroes out of fear of property values falling. Aside from this, de facto segregation must be attacked through housing laws before segregated educational patterns can be fully attacked.

EDUCATION. We would also like to see these two areas of improvement in the field of education and civil rights:

1. We would like textbook selection committees to include representatives of minority groups to insure that books are chosen which adequately present the history of minority groups.

The NAACP is meeting with the State Textbook Commission on April 17 to present reasons why multicultural books should be in every school in the state, not just where there are Negroes. We hope to have the force of the Las Vegas community behind this effort. Books alone could do much to change the attitudes of many whites and bring better communications between the races.

2. We would also like to see civil rights divisions set up in the state school systems to deal with civil rights problems. Marvin Picollo, the Washoe County school superintendent, has expressed an interest in such a division in this county in accordance with our suggestion, and we also hope to meet with him on April 17.

We also believe there should be a civil rights division in the State Department of Education for all schools that are receiving state and federal funds. Such a division would be charged with the textbook question, as well as swaying attitudes of students, faculty, administrators and the education department itself. There is obviously something wrong when a child can graduate from school racially prejudiced, full of fear for the Negro. This means that schools, which should be the height of civilization, fail somewhere. The schools are our hope for changing the present conditions where Negroes and whites stare at each other like strangers or uncivilized animals.

EMPLOYMENT. We also believe that the present law covering fair employment in Nevada is too weak, and should be changed. In a special session on civil rights we would like to see the law changed from affecting only em-

ployers who have 15 or more employees, to include all employers who have one or more employees. The law now leaves too many exempt from the provisions of fair employment.

NEVADA COMMISSION ON EQUAL RIGHTS. Finally, we believe a special session should take up the matter of more staff for the Equal Rights Commission. For one thing, the budget should include funds for an attorney. Operating with spare time help from lawyers makes it difficult to have legal consultation on many cases.

Existing civil rights problems definitely cannot be handled by the two persons now employed by the Commission. Lack of budget paralyzes the present staff to move from one part of the state to another. We believe that five additional field staff people are needed just to scratch the surface of the problems that face us in this state right now. The present staff of two persons would hardly be enough for northern Nevada, much less for the whole state.

The present budget of the Commission averages about 82¢ per Negro in Nevada annually. Negroes pay millions of dollars into the local and state treasuries. It is estimated that more than two million dollars are paid by Negroes in sales tax alone. More than 82¢ apiece of our tax money should be directed toward the many problems faced by Negroes living in Nevada today.

In asking for a special session, we have been shocked at the legislators for their silence, and for those who feel that civil rights is not important enough for a special session. It is simple to estimate the cost of a session, but the cost of NOT having a session cannot be estimated. We believe the lives and property and well being of the people of this state are fully as important as the pollution at Lake Tahoe which merited a special session.

We have heard publicly from only two legislators as of this date; one for and one against holding a session on civil rights. Some Washoe County legislators have indicated privately, however, that they would be willing to go to Carson City for a special session -- two senators and four assemblymen. One senator put it this way, that is what he was elected for -- to

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