

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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File

May 15, 1959

Mr. Jackie Robinson  
c/o NEW YORK POST  
75 West Street  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Robinson:

The column you wrote which appeared in the May 8th issue of the New York Post has been called to my attention because of the references to my civil rights record.

In this connection, you state that you wonder "just what was said by and to" me "behind closed doors at the Southern Governors Conference." This reference puzzles me, for I neither attended the Conference nor spoke by telephone to any person attending the Conference. In fact, the only information I received about the Conference was the press reports, and I never, at any time, had any indication concerning the nature of secret discussions, if there were any, that may have taken place.

You also imply in the article that my voting record upon civil rights is subject to criticism. The NAACP scrutinized that record in connection with my campaign for the Senate last year. Mr. Wilkins, the Executive Secretary of that organization, wrote to the Chairman of the Massachusetts Citizens Committee for Minority Rights as follows: "In response to your inquiry, we are pleased to report that, according to our records, Senator Kennedy has one of the best voting records on civil rights and related issues of any Senator in Congress."

He continued: "It would require too much time and space to detail Senator Kennedy's record over his twelve years' service in the House and in the Senate. That record has been consistent in its espousal of the civil rights cause.." Mr. Wilkins called particular attention to the votes which supported motions to have the Senate adopt rules at the beginning of the new Congress, which were cast as far back as 1953 when Senator Kennedy first came to the Senate, his active leadership in the fight in 1956 against the Electoral College Amendment which would have cut in half the voting power of minority groups in non-Southern states, and his vote to retain Part III of the civil rights bill, which would give the Attorney General of the United States "the power to proceed with civil action against all forms of denial of civil rights to Negro citizens, not merely voting rights." Mr. Wilkins concluded: "The Senator's record, taken as a whole, and including certainly his forthright and repeated support of the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, in the public

"school desegregation cases, must be regarded,.....as one of the best voting records on civil rights and related issues of any Senator in the Congress."

You refer in your column to a vote to send the 1957 civil rights bill back to committee. This vote was largely a question of judgment, and such staunch civil rights supporters as Senator Morse agreed with me that it would be the better procedure to have the bill sent to committee. Then, after that, the civil rights opponents could not argue that the bill had not been properly considered, and in the final vote the supporters of civil rights would be stronger. Moreover, even today the procedural device of considering a bill without committee action eliminates one of the protections of minority groups against precipitate action by the majority.

For your information, I am enclosing a statement of my civil rights record.

I agree with you that Negro voters, like any other citizens, should consider what is best for Americans. Foreign policy, farm policy, national defense, labor legislation, and other crucial problems must be weighed along with the stand of a candidate upon civil rights. This is the way to make democracy work.

With every good wish,

Sincerely yours,



John F. Kennedy

JFK/kr  
Enclosure

SECRETARIA  
SIGNATURE