

*Riots*

From the Office of  
Congressman MELVIN R. LAIRD (R-WIS)  
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Washington, D. C. 20515

FOR RELEASE: P.M.'s  
WEDNESDAY,  
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Attached is the text of a letter from Representative MELVIN R.  
LAIRD (R-Wis) to the President of the United States concerning the urban  
unrest in America today.

RECEIVED

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August 31, 1967

The Honorable Lyndon B. Johnson  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

I write this letter reluctantly and with some foreboding lest it be interpreted as partisan in nature. Nothing could be further from my intentions, but events of recent weeks here in our nation compel me to transmit my thoughts to you.

We are all sick at heart over the turmoil and disruption that has marked many of the cities in our nation during these past three summers. This turmoil has given rise to charges and countercharges from all levels of government and from all sides of the political spectrum concerning the continuing breakdown in our society. Debate has raged around the question of whose lack of foresight and action has been primarily to blame.

All of us, I think, can agree that it is time to shift the emphasis from debate to action, that it is time to stop seeking scapegoats and start implementing solutions.

The Urban Coalition which met here in Washington last week had this to say in its "Statement of Principles, Goals, and Commitments:"

Confronted by these catastrophic events (the riots of the past three summers), we, as representatives of business, labor, religion, civil rights, and local government, have joined in this Convocation to create a sense of national urgency on the need for positive action for all of the people of our cities. (emphasis added)

Mr. President, I applaud the efforts of the Urban Coalition, as I am sure you do, for attempting to create the "sense of national urgency" that is so vitally needed.

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Unfortunately, they -- like all other segments of our society save perhaps the Presidency itself -- operate at a distinct handicap when it comes to translating this "sense of national urgency" into meaningful and effective action.

Mr. President, we have already had three summers of growing turbulence in our cities -- each one worse than the one before. Yet, we continue to delay immediate action on the apparent premise that the nation is incapable of action without specific statutory authority from the Congress.

The Urban Coalition itself, demonstrated its recognition -- if only a partial one -- that the nation can act without necessarily awaiting Congressional Action. Its call for the creation of one million jobs for the presently unemployed with emphasis on private sector activity is worthy of serious consideration.

Frankly, Mr. President, I am more disturbed than I care to admit over the repeated allegations that somehow the nation has been frustrated by Congressional inaction on urban programs.

Your own letter to Senator Mansfield listed 23 programs that have been pending before Congress since January. If Congress gave you tomorrow every cent you requested in those programs, the total amount available for, as you phrase it, "an all-out commitment to...our cities" would only be \$6.7 billion to be disbursed in varying amounts over many thousands of communities throughout these United States.

Over the past weekend, the nation's press quoted Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Robert Weaver as having taken a "show me" attitude with regard to the recommendations of the Urban Coalition. According to the Baltimore Sun, he said, "I want to know how they're going to get the million jobs."

Your Press Secretary, Mr. Christian, is reported to have said that you are postponing the adoption of any major new recommendations that might emanate from your task forces on urban problems until they can be "unveiled" in next January's State of the Union message. This I cannot bring myself to believe, Mr. President, for I know how deeply you and all Americans desire to get on with the job of building a good society here in America now.

In Syracuse, New York, last August, you yourself warned, "this is no time to delay..." in references to the grave problems that face our cities. In your letter to Senator Mansfield on August 16, you said:

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The task before us is immense. But we have charted a beginning -- and we have done so with the help of the best and most experienced minds in the nation. I believe the enactment and funding of these programs (the 23 pending before Congress) is the first step in making this commitment a reality for the people of America.

Mr. President, I commend you for the sentiments you expressed in that letter and in the many public statements you have made concerning the grave problems that face our cities. But I would respectfully differ with your conclusion that "the enactment and funding of these programs is the first step in making this commitment a reality for the people of America."

We do not have to wait for the enactment of another program or the appropriation of another dollar by Congress in order to get on with the job of reducing the problems we face throughout urban America.

Rather, through enlightened leadership on the part of the President, we could begin immediately toward accomplishing the goal set forth by the Urban Coalition of "putting at least one million of the presently unemployed into productive work at the earliest possible moment."

Specifically, Mr. President, I recommend that you as the Chief Executive of our great nation call together an emergency conference of all 50 governors, the mayors of at least the major cities if not all of our cities, as well as national leaders in the fields of business, labor, and religion for a very specific purpose.

The primary purpose of such an emergency conference convened by you would be to lend the prestige and persuasive powers of your office to the end that private industry throughout our nation and especially in the larger metropolitan areas would begin immediately to implement a program which, in the words of the Urban Coalition's statement of principle, would "seek out the unemployed and underemployed and enlist them in basic and positive private training and employment programs" for existing jobs in individual enterprises and industries.

Such a conference, convened by you as our Chief Executive would, I am convinced, mobilize this nation and provide the added impetus so necessary to compel the governors and mayors throughout our nation to call their own conferences of key business and civic leaders in their respective states and communities in order to put such a program into effect in the immediate future.

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As you know, Mr. President, we in the Minority have urged enactment by the Congress of the Human Investment Act for the past three years. The Human Investment Act would provide a 10% tax credit to industry for the training costs incurred under such a program. However, it is my own view that we need not await legislation by Congress in order to persuade private enterprise throughout our nation to begin implementation of such a program now.

Certainly, I would hope, that we in the Congress and you, as Chief Executive, would pledge early efforts to enact a program similar to the Human Investment Act which would provide tax credits for training costs. However, it is not necessary, in my view, to await such action by Congress before urging private industry to undertake or step up such programs now.

Mr. President, I cannot tell you how deeply I feel the need for some such action on the part of the Chief Executive of our nation. We all hunger for the kind of decisive leadership only the office of the President can provide and I urge you as President of all the people to undertake such a step now.

With best wishes and kindest personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Melvin R. Laird  
Member of Congress

MRL:r