C.R.

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

April 5, 1968

Dear Colleague:

We believe that the House should adopt the Senate-passed civil rights bill of 1968. On two previous occasions -- in 1960 and in 1964 -- the House, without requesting a Conference, adopted significantly altered versions of House-approved civil rights bills.

We are convinced that this measure -- approved in the Senate by 29 Republicans and 42 Democrats -- is sound and just legislation. While we recognize that, like most complex bills, this bill is not perfect in every detail, it does seek to protect certain fundamental individual rights and assure equality of opportunity for all of our citizens. It is an affront to human dignity for any American to find that even though his bank balance is ample, his credit rating is good, and the character of his family is above reproach, he still cannot buy or rent better housing because his skin is not white.

Some questions have been raised regarding the various new sections incorporated in the Senate bill.

Title I, the anti-riot section, embraces areas covered in H.R. 421 and H.R. 2516 (protection of civil rights workers). Both bills passed the House in 1967. Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee expressed the view in Committee Reports on both that the two bills actually bear on the same problem, and, therefore, should be combined. The Senate has accepted this approach.

Titles II through VII, deal with the rights of American Indians. Our colleague, Ben Reifel of South Dakota, the only American Indian now serving in Congress, enthusiastically supports this Indian Bill of Rights as being long overdue.

Title X, regulates the use of firearms in connection with civil disorders. Senator Roman Hruska of Nebraska is the author of firearms legislation which has the endorsement of sportsmen's groups throughout the country. He voted for this civil rights bill in the Senate.

The key vote will be on a procedural question that will determine whether or not the House accepts the Senate bill without a Conference.

If the bill goes to Conference, the best that can be said is that it faces an uncertain future. Once this bill goes to Conference, it must make its tortuous way through the Senate again even though no changes in the Senate bill are made by the conferees. There is grave danger that delay could defeat the bill.

There is no Republican policy position on this bill. It should be noted that Bill McCulloch, the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, intends to vote against sending the Senate bill to Conference. We know that a substantial number of Republicans intend to support that position. At this time, it appears that approximately 200 House members are prepared to vote for the Senate bill. The votes of additional Republicans and Democrats are obviously needed to pass this legislation.

Of course we share the reservations of some of our colleagues with respect to the draftsmanship of the Senate bill and the parliamentary procedures being followed. But we also share the conviction that it is urgent for our nation that effective open housing legislation be passed this year. This matter of simple justice has been too long denied. Weighing all these considerations in the balance, we conclude that the civil rights bill should not be exposed to further unnecessary hazards.

We ask your help by voting and urging our colleagues to vote for the Senate bill without sending it to Conference.

Sincerely,

William M. McCulloch

John N. Erlenborn

Robert Taft, Jr.

Albert H. Quie

William C. Cowger

Ben Reifel

Edward G. Biester, Jr.

Peter H.B. Frelinghuysen

Clark MacGregor

Howard W. Robison

William A. Steiger

John R. Dellenback

Paul Findley

Joseph M. McDade

Thomas S. Kleppe

Alexander Pirnie

Gilbert Gude

Paul N. McCloskey

F. Bradford Morse

Charles W. Whalen, Jr.

Charles E. Goodell