

# PRESIDENT SENDS CIVIL RIGHTS PLEA TO SCHOOL BOARDS

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Letters Call for Cooperation With Biracial Panels and Effort to Cut Drop-Outs

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, July 19 — President Kennedy has sent a personal appeal to the presidents of thousands of school boards across the country for "your help in solving the grave civil rights problems faced by this nation."

Letters over Mr. Kennedy's signature were mailed last July 12. They also asked for cooperation in a nationwide effort this summer to persuade young people to return to school in September and reduce the number of drop-outs.

Mr. Kennedy urged the school board presidents to work actively with biracial commissions to solve civil rights issues, and to press for creation of such commissions where there were none.

In more general terms, the President voiced the hope that they would "discuss this letter with your colleagues and if possible enlist their support."

## Asks Report by Aug. 15

Turning to the problem of drop-outs, the President went on:

"I urge you to commence to intensify your effort immediately in meeting this national problem, and suggest that you advise Commissioner [Francis] Keppel of the United States Office of Education of your progress—I would hope there could be an initial report by Aug. 15 and again by the end of September outlining the progress you have been able to achieve.

"Whether there is a significant reduction in drop-outs when schools resume in the fall will depend, in great measure, on your efforts in your own community. We solicit your sympathetic support and assistance."

Mr. Kennedy has repeatedly emphasized that the drop-out problem is related to the civil rights issue because of a diminishing market for untrained workers and the high proportion of unemployed Negroes.

But he told the school board executives that the problem affected both white and Negro students.

"It is of particular significance," Mr. Kennedy said, "because of a lack of job opportunities for inadequately trained

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youth and the explosive situation in many of our great cities.

The President met recently at the White House with representatives from all levels of education. He was urged at that time to write personally to school board presidents.

Meanwhile, at a hearing of a House Judiciary subcommittee, Walter P. Reuther urged Congress to create Federal registrars who would be able to sign up "millions of Negro voters in the South."

Mr. Reuther, the head of the United Automobile Workers Union, said he favored "the wholesale approach to voting rights rather than the retail approach taken by President Kennedy."

The Administration's seven-point civil rights bill includes a provision for appointment of temporary voting referees to speed cases brought by Negroes who charge they are unable to register because of racial discrimination.

## Would Strengthen Bill

Mr. Reuther praised Mr. Kennedy's "courageous action" in calling for a sweeping civil rights bill, but said the measure should be strengthened in other ways.

He called for greater Federal authority to institute civil right suits and advance school desegregation. He also recommended that a provision estab-

lishing a Fair Employment Practices Commission be included in the omnibus bill.

A separate bill setting up such a commission has been approved by another committee. Mr. Reuther said, however, its chances of final passage would be better if it were placed in the over-all bill.

Mr. Reuther discarded a prepared statement and spoke for more than an hour on Negro rights, human freedom and the meaning of democracy. At one point he said:

"Each of us must understand that human freedom is indivisible. Every American's freedom is jeopardized when the freedom of any American is denied.

"We cannot defend freedom in Berlin as long as we deny it in Birmingham. No one will take us seriously.

"We must measure progress in the field of civil rights not from where we have come, but from where we have to go."

"If Congress has the constitutional right to regulate the color of margarine served in a restaurant how can anyone say it does not have the right to regulate the color of the people who will be allowed to enter that restaurant?"

"The central question before this committee is: Can American Democracy be true to itself? Can we find practical ways to implement the central value of Democracy — a belief in the dignity and worth of each person?"