

**BACKGROUND**

# Atlanta's Mayor: 'All Alone With His Courage'

By **WALTER RUGABER**

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ATLANTA — For days the word went out from the big businessmen and civic leaders, the political pros and public opinion molders, the people in Atlanta who usually count the most.

"You're making a big mistake."

The message was plain, blunt, and nearly unanimous. Ivan Allen Jr., the 52-year-old merchant-turned-mayor, listened very carefully.

Then all alone with his courage, he flew off to Washington and went before the Senate Commerce Committee to read a carefully-drafted 14-page statement.

"Gentleman," the mayor said firmly, "if I had your problem, armed with the local experience I have had, I would pass a public accommodations law."

**ALLEN THUS BECAME THE** first — and just possibly the last — southern politician to voice public approval of the most controversial portion of the civil rights bill.

The mayor came back to Atlanta and found two main schools of thought about his startling behavior before the Senate committee.

The least substantial version put it down as a shallow bid for Negro votes, but seasoned observers said that even with a full turnout he would still need plenty of support from whites.

For a quarter-century, winning Atlanta politics has been based on a highly successful "alliance" between Negroes and so-called better class whites.

And the thought was that the latter might prefer free enterprise more than Allen when the 1966 term comes up. The mayor has indicated that he intends to run again.

**THE SECOND FEELING** about the mayor's testimony considered the possibility that he had talked with President Kennedy and was angling for a federal job.

Allen denied it stoutly, insisting that he talked with no one in Washington except the committee official who invited him to appear.

He later received a short letter from the President which praised "a number of effective points" in the statement. May-



**IVAN ALLEN JR.**  
... listened, but

or Allen seemed genuinely surprised by it.

About his testimony, he says simply that the nation's may-

ors have been stuck out on a limb and left there to handle the whole racial crisis by themselves.

The Supreme Court has been striking down segregation laws for years, he points out, and yet no really solid legislation has taken its place.

**MAYOR ALLEN** has faced nearly a dozen "mayor" desegregation crises. The collapse of racial barriers has come with increasing frequency here, always with some difficulty.

"The whole damn thing is pushed down the throats of local officials because everyone is scared to touch it," the mayor declared.

"Local governments have no definition of responsibility," he complains. "... this is a national problem and it deserves national direction."