Among other provisions in the Constitution of the United States, as you know, is one which assures equal protection of the laws to all people and another which provides that citizens born and naturalized in the United States are citizens of the United States and that their rights and privileges as such cannot be abridged or denied by state action.

This is the supreme law of the land and my basic interest in civil rights legislation is to give meaning and substance to the assurances and guarantees contained in the Constitution since it must apply to all people regardless of race, creed or color.

Sincerely,

Everett McKinley Dirksen
United States Senate
Minority Leader

April 22, 1960

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Dear ...,:

The problem of the Senate in dealing with the issue of civil rights was that we were dealing with a constitutional issue which was set in motion by the Supreme Court decision in 1954 mandating states and the political subdivisions of states to terminate segregation with all deliberate speed and the problem then is how to implement that decision by appropriate congressional action.

The other real problem related to voting rights and here we sought to remove the obstacles and impediments encountered by people of color in certain states in meeting the qualifications necessary to register, to vote and to have the vote counted.

In the main I thought we contrived a moderate bill which at the same time can be regarded as a significant forward step in this field. These are issues which the Congress cannot very well shirk because they constitute something of a crisis.

All in all, however, I thought the Senate action was fully justified.

Sincerely,

Everett McKinley Dirksen