

FROM: Commission on Religion and Race  
National Council of Churches  
110 Maryland Ave., NE  
Washington, DC

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For Release:  
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STATEMENT CONCERNING MOTION TO DISMISS MISSISSIPPI  
SEATING CHALLENGE IN U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The plan to ask the U.S. House of Representatives to dismiss the seating challenge brought by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party against the incumbent Mississippi delegation without adequately hearing the evidence is the worst abuse of Congressional rules and responsibility.

Last January, at the opening of this 89th session, 149 members of the House in landmark action voted against seating the five Mississippi Congressmen. The delegation was seated, but an investigation was begun of the charges that eligible residents have been systematically denied the right to vote in Mississippi.

That investigation produced a mountain of evidence, wholly uncontradicted by anyone publicly, that Negroes, a major segment of Mississippi's population, have been barred for decades, by the various refinements of discrimination, from exercising the most fundamental right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

Disposition of that evidence has been a model of political cynicism. First, although the information was filed in ample time, the Clerk of the House dragged out for months printing the testimony. Now we have the attempt to have the whole matter, so basic to the life of this Democracy, buried without ceremony in the wastebasket of Congressional history. It is a classic illustration, if one is needed, of how badly certain parts of our society are represented in the halls of government. Mississippi's Negroes - and other minorities, economic as well as racial - properly ask whether they, indeed, have any voice in this, the highest legislative body in the land. If the motion to dismiss the challenge is acted upon before it is reviewed in the light of full House scrutiny, the answer would seem to be "No."

The Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches most earnestly urges the House of Representatives to give the seating challenge brought against the incumbent Mississippi Representatives a full and fair hearing. The commission bases its appeal on first-hand experience of the difficulties and dangers of Negro participation in the political process in Mississippi. It is not the government's plea of ignorant churchmen.

The House of Representatives has a duty before it. To fail will be the worst kind of disservice to all our citizens and will give many people all the more reason to believe that our government is not responsive to direct appeals for correction of the abuses and weaknesses that have made so many so voiceless so long.

by Rev. Dr. Robert W. Spike  
Executive Director