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Congress of the United States

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

(CREATED PURSUANT TO SEC. 5(a) OF PUBLIC LAW 304, 79TH CONGRESS)

July 24, 1964

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Watts
227 East Jefferson Avenue
Naperville, Illinois

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Watts:

Thank you for your recent message expressing your concern about the safety of the young people who are working in Mississippi this summer under the project sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations. I have heard from a number of parents and grandparents in Illinois, who, like you, are deeply concerned about the welfare of their child or grandchild who is in Mississippi. I appreciate your letting me know this, and I share and understand your anxiety.

I am shocked and deeply distressed, as I know you are, at the unexplained disappearance of the three students. President Johnson and the Justice Department responded promptly in mobilizing the search for them and I supported this action. I hope, although there does not seem to be much cause to give one hope, that these students will be found unharmed and that no further apparent tragedies of this sort will occur.

At the direction of President Johnson the Department of Justice has sent to Mississippi a considerable number of federal marshalls and FBI agents to help avert attacks on the students working there under the COFO project. The Administration has my full support in doing this and in taking further steps, which are legal and appropriate, to protect the project workers and those they are trying to help when local law enforcement officials are unable or unwilling to do so.

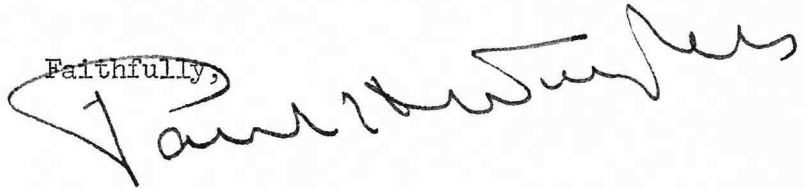
I regret very much, however, the impression which some of the supporters of the project may have been given that it was likely or even possible for the Federal Government to send thousands of federal marshalls into Mississippi in order to blanket the State with federal law enforcement. The facts simply are that we do not have a national police force with which to do this and that there are severe constitutional and practical limitations on the authority of the national government to attempt to wrest control of local government from local and state officials. The present denial of individual rights and failure of law enforcement in many areas of the South is disheartening

and a strong provocation to attempt national police force action. But we must also consider whether we want to destroy the limitations and divisions of power under the federal system. Do we wish to institute a national police force which today would claim to enforce individual rights in Mississippi but which tomorrow might, following a change in public opinion, destroy individual rights in Illinois?

The students working in the project are idealistic and self-sacrificing. They have a right to be there and to help the suppressed Negroes to become literate and to secure and execute their right to vote. They are taking a great personal risk in defense of freedom. I shall support all appropriate efforts by the Administration to protect them, just as I have worked for 16 years in the Senate for enactment of effective legislation to protect the civil rights of all Americans.

With best wishes,

Faithfully,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Paul H. Douglas". The signature is written over the word "Faithfully,".

Paul H. Douglas

PHD:KGi