

DIARY OF WHITE HOUSE LEADERSHIP
MEETINGS -- 91st CONGRESS

March 24, 1970

This morning's breakfast meeting was attended by the leadership of both parties of both Houses.

After Red Blount reported on the progress of the postal strike, the President spent 15 minutes making a preliminary explanation of the 8,000-word message he is sending to Congress today concerning school desegregation. It was a candid, completely natural and unaffected dissertation reflecting his views as a lawyer concerning the present state of the law on the subject and his view as a person concerning the morality of the issue. He asked Ehrlichman to read the principles unannounced in the message and then invited questions.

A number of questions were asked about the \$1.5 billion grant to school districts which have special desegregation burdens. Among these was one propounded by Ted Kennedy, viz, "what other programs will be cut in order to find this sum in the 1971 and 1972 budgets?" The President replied that while tentative decisions have been made, precise decisions are yet to be made. He predicted that he would be able to give the Congress a special message on this point within the next 3 weeks.

I thought the President's statement was eminently reasonable. For that very reason, it is likely to be attacked by each of the two extremes as unreasonable. Specifically I predict that there will be some who will criticize the \$1.5 billion figure as a feeble gesture while others will say that it is to be used to buy \$1.5 billion worth of buses.

In order to attend a 10:00 o'clock Republican Conference in the House, we adjourned at 9:55. The President invited all to go out on the front steps for group pictures.



As I left, Bill Timmons asked me to remain behind in the Library with John Mitchell, Jerry Ford, Les Arends and John Rhodes to discuss the 18 year-old voting parliamentary situation. There is some confusion about what Chairman Celler seeks to accomplish and what methods he may use. However, the last word seems to be that he prefers to surrender his opposition on the 18-year-old vote statute as the purchase price for the Senate amendments on the Voting Rights Act. If this is correct, then he will doubtless want to make a motion to recede and concur in the Senate amendments. One question was whether or not such a motion requires a rule. If it does require a rule, can amendments be made in order by voting down the previous question? If so, would it be in order to make a motion to go to conference? Even if it would be in order and after the conferees were appointed, it would then be possible to make a motion to instruct conferees to accept the 18-year-old vote provision.

I recommended that the Administration broaden its present position in support of a constitutional amendment granting the franchise in the federal elections to 18-year-olds to include all elections. This would be a tactical measure designed to give anxious Republicans a hat-hanging peg. It was agreed that someone should see if such a procedure would be acceptable to Celler and McCulloch. The question arose, who is to see them? A meaningful silence descended upon the small gathering, and after a respectable pause and while everyone was looking at me, I said, "I would not wish that on anybody." It was decided that Jerry Ford would do the honors. He lucked out again. It was further agreed that without their help, it would be pointless for the Administration to broaden its position on the constitutional amendment.

RICHARD H. POFF

