

## Letter #1: From Charles A. Geiser (7/9/1965)

<https://docsteach.org/documents/document/letter-from-charles-a-geiser-to-the-honorable-emmanuel-celler-opposing-voting-rights>

6188 Dry Harbor Road  
Rye Beach 79, N.Y.  
July 9, 1965

Mr. Emmanuel Celler, Representative  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Celler:

Why do you advocate no literacy tests as a qualification for voting? Is your district so saturated with illiterates that you fear the loss of your seat in Congress at voting time?

Literacy and good knowledge of English is required of foreigners immigrating to the United States and seeking their citizenship papers. What's the difference? Why discriminate against this group?

Besides this, how can anyone be sure that un-scrupulous politicians won't direct illiterates how to vote for their own sake by advising them which line to pull the indicators on voting machines or which name to write an "X" alongside on paper ballots of which they have no knowledge.

You are carrying this too far - I'd appreciate an answer to my questions.

Yours truly,  
Charles A. Geiser

Handwritten notes on the letter:

- 6188 Dry Harbor Road
- Rye Beach 79, N.Y.
- July 9, 1965
- Mr. Emmanuel Celler, Representative
- House of Representatives
- Washington, D.C.
- Dear Mr. Celler:
- Why do you advocate no literacy tests as a qualification for voting?
- Is your district so saturated with illiterates that you fear the loss of your seat in Congress at voting time?
- Literacy and good knowledge of English is required of foreigners immigrating to the United States and seeking their citizenship papers. What's the difference? Why discriminate against this group?
- Besides this, how can anyone be sure that un-scrupulous politicians won't direct illiterates how to vote for their own sake by advising them which line to pull the indicators on voting machines or which name to write an "X" alongside on paper ballots of which they have no knowledge.
- You are carrying this too far - I'd appreciate an answer to my questions.
- Yours truly, Charles A. Geiser

Transcript: Why do you advocate no literacy tests as a qualification for voting? Is your district so saturated with illiterates that you fear the loss of your seat in Congress at voting time? Literacy and good knowledge of English is required of foreigners immigrating to the United States and seeking their citizenship papers. What's the difference? Why discriminate against this group? Besides this, how can anyone be sure that un-scrupulous politicians won't direct illiterates how to vote for their own sake by advising them which line to pull the indicators on voting machines or which name to write an "X" alongside on paper ballots of which they have no knowledge. You are carrying this too far - I'd appreciate an answer to my questions.

## **Questions**

### **What is the author's perspective?**

That literacy tests are a good thing. They should be required to determine voter eligibility.

### **Why was it written?**

To express a viewpoint on literacy tests and the Voting Rights Act.

To pose questions this citizen has on why members of Congress would want to pass such legislation and express concerns about what might happen if it is passed.

### **How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?**

Leading up to 1965, there were many people that held discriminatory views towards African Americans.

Maybe Mr. Geiser had first-hand experience with illiterate individuals or corrupt politicians and he was therefore projecting that experience to entire groups.

### **What claims does the author make that may need further research?**

That the current requirements for voting (without the Voting Rights Act) were no different than citizenship requirements

If there is evidence to show that politicians have been trying to take advantage of voters in the past

### **How does the document's word choice indicate the author's perspective?**

The author poses a lot of questions in his letter to show that he isn't convinced about the merits of the legislation.

He underlines words like "and good" to emphasize that he finds literacy an important qualification for voting

"You are carrying this too far"

## Letter #2: From George Neu (3/26/1965)

<https://docsteach.org/documents/document/letter-from-george-neu-opposed-to-the-voting-rights-act-of>

-1965

62 Rexford Drive  
Newport News, Virginia  
March 26, 1965

Chairman, Committee of Judiciary  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C.

*Ben*

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I recognize that the effort expended in writing this letter will probably be in vain, but so strongly do I feel about the constitutional ramifications of the subject that I have decided to express myself on the matter, realizing the probable futility of doing so. I am referring to the so-called voting rights bill proposed to the Congress.

This nation is in the midst of mass hysteria generated by minority pressure groups with the active assistance of the press and the Administration, and whose sole purpose is to force certain conditions on the United States regardless of the issues and heedless of the costs. It is a classic example of surrender to the dictum of ends justifying means. In this case and so many like it, this country is discarding--ever so slowly but inexorably--the safeguards which have long protected it against totalitarianism. The average citizen and, incomprehensibly, apparently even the average congressman, never realizes it. He trades off a liberty for a new government "benefit" and believes he has made a good bargain. Centralization of power in an already bloated Federal bureaucracy is advanced one more step; several thousand or hundred thousand individuals or families are beholden to perpetuating the status quo, which usually means the administration which provided the benefit to them. The German nation did exactly the same thing in the thirties, at a much more rapid rate, to be sure. But make no mistake about it, the United States of America in the decade of the sixties has taken the same road.

This bill is a particularly egregious example of a milestone on that road. It is patently unconstitutional. It is an indefensible intrusion by the Federal government into an area where it has no constitutional right. It is the product of political expediency. It is politically motivated by an Administration which is willing to sacrifice the Constitution for the unquestioned allegiance of a highly vocal minority, aided and abetted by the radical judiciary and a large segment of the unquestioning press.

The Congress is the last bastion of the beleaguered forces who hope to preserve constitutional and republican government in this land. I urge you and your committee to oppose this legislation in spite of the political pressures for its passage; not on the basis of the rightness or wrongness of its objectives, but on the basis of constitutionality.

Sincerely yours,

*George Neu*  
George Neu



## **Questions**

### **What is the author's perspective?**

That the support for the Voting Rights Act comes from minority pressure and media; that safeguards against totalitarianism are being compromised; that the federal government is taking on too much power; too many individuals and families rely on benefits from the federal government

The Voting Rights Act is unconstitutional.

### **Why was it written?**

He wanted to express his opinion on the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and urge members of Congress not to vote in favor of the legislation.

### **How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?**

Mr. Neu is from Virginia, a more Southern state

Mr. Neu may have grown up only knowing a United States that treated African Americans in a particular way

Mr. Neu may have heard similar arguments from local/state officials

### **What claims does the author make that may need further research?**

"mass hysteria generated by minority pressure groups with the active assistance of the press and the Administration..."

"several thousand or hundred thousand individuals or families are beholden..."

"It is patently unconstitutional."

### **How does the document's word choice indicate the author's perspective?**

He uses a lot of strong language like "strongly do I feel" and "urge" to help show the importance of the topic to him. He uses sensational words and phrases like "mass hysteria" and references to Germany in the 1930s to incite fear. But he also writes things like "writing this letter will probably be in vain" which indicates he has the sense that Congress will support this legislation.