

May 26, 1966

TO: CONVENTION DELEGATES
NEW JERSEY CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

New Jersey State Library

The people of the State of New Jersey have selected the Delegates here assembled to adopt a legislative plan which will shape the destiny and future of this State for many years. The voters of this State sent us to this Convention in a bipartisan framework and spirit. Petty or partisan battles were avoided and the people chose all to act for the common good. If we are to fulfill the sacred obligation with which we have been entrusted, all of us Delegates must act not for any supposed partisan advantage or merely to protect the self interest of a political party, but, instead, to adopt a system best for all of the people of this State. If the history that has been absorbed by us in preparation for the duties in this Convention and during our service here teaches any lessons, it is that only a political party that addresses itself to the needs and best interests of the people will prevail. No system, however much designed for partisan advantage, can long frustrate the will of the people. Therefore, we must approach the fulfillment of our duties with a view in mind of what is best for New Jersey and its people.

When we came to this Hall in New Brunswick, many of us were imbued with an attachment to the traditional bicameral system. I, myself, came so minded. However, as I have listened to the thoughts and objectives of my fellow Delegates and pondered as to a re-apportionment solution for this State, my mind began to open and past prejudices began to evaporate. The full realization began to take hold as to the revolutionary trends started by the Court re-apportionment decisions not only as to shifting voting strengths, but also as to the constitution and form of legislative bodies. No longer is it logical to have two Houses in a Legislature both of which must reflect a population basis. But more than that, opportunity is before us to correct inefficiencies, duplication and inadequacies of the past. Most important of all, however, is the opportunity to bring

the Legislative branch closer to the people and to develop a greater identification with them on behalf of all legislators.

In 1947 a prior Constitutional Convention began the process of bringing New Jersey's Executive and Judicial branches into the Twentieth Century. Since then, both have become models throughout the entire United States. Now it is time to modernize and strengthen the Legislative branch: if only in order to maintain our traditional checks and balances system of Government this is a sine qua non.

A unicameral legislature will best meet these goals. The permissible systems thereunder are flexible enough to meet the objectives of almost all in this Convention. My own preference is for a combination of at-large and single member district representation as embodied in several proposals introduced in this Convention. This would insure a fair system encouraging greater minority representation and a strong two Party system. Large groups of voters would not be left with their views unrepresented, and yet, at the same time, a wider viewpoint arising from at-large constituencies would be present. This Convention must insist that the plan it adopts be a fair one best suited to meet the needs of the future.

To keep faith with the courage and wisdom of the people of this State, it is our duty to adopt a legislative proposal that is dynamic and forward looking which will survive the tests and challenges of time. It must be one oriented to the future and not one burdened with anachronisms. Only a unicameral plan fulfills these demands.