EDWARD M. KENNEDY
MASSACHUSETTS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

April 25, 1973

Mr. [redacted] Thursby
[redacted]

Dear Mr. Thursby:

Thank you for taking the time to express your views on amnesty.

We all are relieved that the war is finally at an end and that the nation can turn its attention to reconciliation and healing the wounds and bitterness created by this long and costly conflict.

Our first task must be to provide security and comfort to the prisoners of war and to help restore them to American society. A like task lies ahead for the disabled veterans and those who became addicted to drugs while overseas. Some humanitarian relief also must be provided to the people of Southeast Asia in their struggle to rebuild a nation ravaged by war.

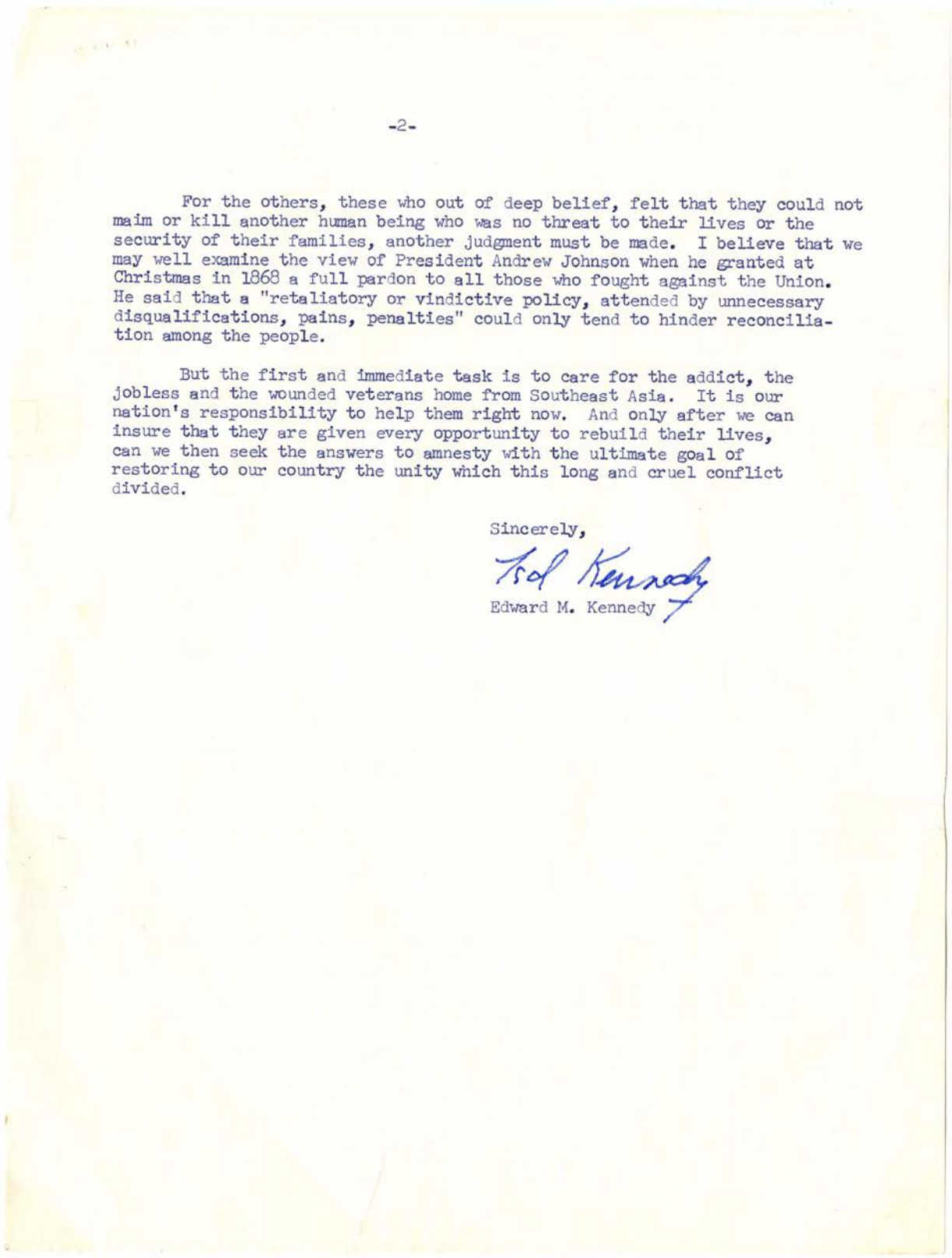
As part of this postwar adjustment, we must examine the question of how to treat those who refused induction by going underground or by leaving their country. During hearings held last year by the Senate Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure, the diversity of opinions was symbolized by the national commander of the American Legion in his statement against amnesty, and by the testimony of a young man who had completed a Federal prison sentence for refusing induction. This young man issued a strong plea for amnesty. There was testimony by one father of a young soldier killed in Vietnam against amnesty. Yet another father of a soldier killed in Vietnam testified for unconditional amnesty. The same contradictory recommendations came in testimony from Vietnam veterans themselves.

In seeking to understand how best to proceed, I believe that our nation can look back at the twenty nine instances of amnesty granted by Presidents in the past, including the unconditional amnesty after the Civil War. We often gain wisdom through learning what other men did at other times in our history. It seems that when the nation was most divided against itself, as it was after the Civil War, the end of hostilities was followed by the most sweeping amnesty in an effort to bind the wounds of war.

While the national interest requires reconciliation, there can be no amnesty for those who committed crimes and then deserted, nor for those whose motives had no relationship to the question of conscientious objection. For these, there only can be a return to face whatever judicial proceedings are demanded under the law.

Edward Kennedy to Mr. Thursby, April 25, 1973, p. 1 (name redacted for privacy)
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09526)

© 2013 The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
www.gilderlehrman.org



-2-

For the others, these who out of deep belief, felt that they could not maim or kill another human being who was no threat to their lives or the security of their families, another judgment must be made. I believe that we may well examine the view of President Andrew Johnson when he granted at Christmas in 1868 a full pardon to all those who fought against the Union. He said that a "retaliatory or vindictive policy, attended by unnecessary disqualifications, pains, penalties" could only tend to hinder reconciliation among the people.

But the first and immediate task is to care for the addict, the jobless and the wounded veterans home from Southeast Asia. It is our nation's responsibility to help them right now. And only after we can insure that they are given every opportunity to rebuild their lives, can we then seek the answers to amnesty with the ultimate goal of restoring to our country the unity which this long and cruel conflict divided.

Sincerely,

Ted Kennedy

Edward M. Kennedy

Edward Kennedy to Mr. Thursby, April 25, 1973, p. 1 (name redacted for privacy)
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09526)

© 2013 The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
www.gilderlehrman.org