

WH6411-03-6164_scroller

Date: 1964-11-04

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Everett M. Dirksen

Start Time: 11:22

Place: LBJ Ranch

TITLE: "We Got to Try to Unite the Country"

SCENE SETTER: Speaking with Senate Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen [R-Illinois] following the 1964 election, President Johnson appealed to Dirksen's sense of duty to pursue a bipartisan agenda in the upcoming legislative session. Reviewing results from the campaign, as well as prior examples of working across the aisle, Johnson told Dirksen that the country "never needed you more."

President Johnson: Well, the first thing you do is take care of yourself, 'cause we love you, and you get in shape. And if anything is emergency—urgent, I'll have a jet plane there to bring you anytime. And [*Dirksen acknowledges*] I want to work awfully close with you, and I think that—I think you got a wonderful chance now to make a great contribution to your party and to the country, too. And I just hope that you take the leadership on it, because we got awful nasty down here. It just got awful nasty.

Everett M. Dirksen: I understand [*unclear*].

President Johnson: The Billie Sol Estes [*scandal*], and they threatened all the Negroes, and they passed out the stuff saying, "We're going to arrest you if you go vote." And it just . . . it was the worst thing that you've ever seen in your lifetime. We got to keep our underlings now from going hog wild and becoming bitter, and we've got to try to unite the country and do like we did when—under [*Dwight D.*] Eisenhower. And at least present a united front when we can, and then we'll slug it out again in '68.

Dirksen: Yeah. Well, I have only two comments to make. I did get a good exchange: I got a Hollywood actor [*George L. Murphy*] for our friend from New York [*Robert F. "Bobby" Kennedy*]. [*Both laugh, and President Johnson snorts.*] So that's on the plus side, I think. And you almost licked my friend [*John J. Williams [R-Delaware]*] in Delaware.

President Johnson: I don't know. What happened up there? [*Dirksen attempts to interject.*] Did he have a close race?

Dirksen: He finally came through.

President Johnson: They told me that he just had—that our man—I dropped off there on the way to New York, but they told me that the governor [*Elbert N. "Bert" Carvel*] just had 31 percent on the polls and Williams had 60-some.

Dirksen: [*chuckling*] Yeah, but it turned out awfully close.

President Johnson: It did?

Dirksen: Yeah.

President Johnson: Well—

Dirksen: I thought Carvel had a very interesting slogan: “What Delaware wants in the Senate is not a policeman but a statesman.” [*Both laugh.*] You think that’s cute?

President Johnson: Yeah. Yeah, John’s been a little rough on us, a little rough on us. And [*Dirksen acknowledges*] he and his secretary are going to have to quieten down some. They oughtn’t to be so mean to us now. But I hope you can take charge of that group, and I’ll work very closely with you, and you know the great respect and the great affection I have for you. I demonstrated that from the day that old [H.] Styles [Bridges] told me you were going to—you wanted to be leader.

Dirksen: Well, it’s mutual, you know.

President Johnson: And I said on every stump in this country that Arthur Vandenberg [Sr.] had worked with [Harry S.] Truman and [on] the Communists in Greece and Turkey, and I’d worked with Eisenhower on the Formosa Straits and Suez, and that Everett Dirksen worked with [John F.] Jack Kennedy on Test Ban [Treaty] and other things. And I think that you got a unique responsibility, and you’re not a gut fighter that gets petty and goes after the little things. So, please, get well; your country never needed you more.

Dirksen: Yeah. Regards to Lady Bird [Johnson].

President Johnson: Thank you.

Dirksen: OK.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: “Lyndon Johnson and Everett Dirksen on 4 November 1964,” Conversation WH6411-03-6164, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [The Election of 1964]*, vol. 2, ed. Kent B. Germany, et al.] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–).