

WH6601-10-9533_scroller

Date: 1966-01-25

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Dwight D. Eisenhower

Start Time: 12:45

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "It Doesn't Bother Me One Bit"

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson consulted with former president Dwight D. Eisenhower about a potential appointment for Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, who had disclosed a family tragedy and wanted Johnson to be aware of it. Johnson and Eisenhower discussed the matter and agreed that in this circumstance, professional ability and integrity outweighed family history.

President Johnson: Hello? Hello, General?

Dwight D. Eisenhower: Mr. President?

President Johnson: Yes, sir.

Eisenhower: Hey, I had a long talk with [Andrew J.] Goodpaster. He was out here yesterday.

President Johnson: Yes.

Eisenhower: And he—there was one point he wanted me to bring up to you so that—so you'd know all about it, and so that if ever there's any embarrassment, you would know all about it and, therefore, make up your own decision. There was a tragedy in his family about seven years ago. His—he had a hot-tempered brother, and he got in a quarrel somewhere, and his brother shot this guy, was sentenced to life [in the] penitentiary. Now, [*clears throat*] he's at—that item is something that he said that he always felt that he had to tell every superior that he ever served for, so that they—if they thought that there was any embarrassment to them by using him, why, they would—they'd do this with their eyes open. That's all.

President Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Eisenhower: And I told him, well, [*chuckles*] this—I knew all about it. It had, matter of fact, occurred in one of—during my term. [*President Johnson acknowledges throughout.*] And I said, well, hell, he wasn't responsible for his brother and respon—and besides that, there was nothing really shameful about it. It was just a crazy thing, that's all. But I told him that I would call you [*clears throat*] back to—so that he—you would, in advance, know about that particular incident.

President Johnson: Fine, General, I appreciate it very much. I am—I talked to some of the people over there. Some of them feel—the secretaries—that if I brought him over here, I might affect his chances. They consider he and [William C.] Westmoreland [and] about one other fellow, just the three best they have that they're considering. And I told them I wanted him to move over here, and they said, well, he had had some service over here, and they're a little bit worried about whether his own fellow officers, or whether if they—if we considered him for something else, whether his assignment right there isn't a little better from his standpoint. I told them I'd consider it and look into it, and I'm going to explore it a little bit further, and then I'll talk to him about it.

Eisenhower: Mr. President, the—when a man gets to this place, this—in his career, he’s established this kind of a record that the President of the United States wants to use him, I don’t see how he can be hurt. Now, the—there might be someone, because his appointment no longer is the responsibility of a board of officers who are going from colonel to brigadier or something like that. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] This is what the President’s decision is as to what’s to be done with him.

President Johnson: Yeah.

Eisenhower: And I’ll tell—my own feeling is that having great respect for the responsibility of the President, he should have the very best man that he believes to be the [*President Johnson acknowledges throughout*] very best man in his—in whatever job he wants. Now, I told Goodpaster, I said, “Now, this may not be exactly what you’d choose. You might rather want to go to a command in Germany or SHAFE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe] or something.” But he says, “Whatever the President wants me to do, that’s the law to me.” That’s all.

President Johnson: That’s wonderful. Thank—

Eisenhower: And I just—these people that worry about these little things, I—this happened to me so often during my career, because I was passed from one general to another. [*President Johnson laughs.*] And all the ritualistic people would tell me I’m ruined. Well, I . . . a man gets to be very good, then other people begin to worry what the hell they should do with him. [*President Johnson laughs.*] Well, now, when he gets this high, why, I think it’s up to the President, and that’s that.

President Johnson: Thank you so much, General. I appreciate your calling me, and I’ll get with him.

Eisenhower: I just told—he just felt so badly about this thing and all.

President Johnson: Oh, no. I wouldn’t pay a bit of attention to it. It doesn’t bother me one bit. I started to tell a fellow one time about my brother, [*Eisenhower acknowledges*] and he said, “Well, wait a minute I’ve got two. Let me tell you about mine.” [*Eisenhower laughs.*] So I understand those things.

Eisenhower: OK.

President Johnson: Thank you, General.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: Conversation WH6601-10-9533, 25 January 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.