

## WH6602-02-9620\_scroller

**Date:** 1966-02-04

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** S. Douglass Cater

**Start Time:** 18:40

**Place:** Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "Don't Make the Government Fall"

SCENE SETTER: Special Assistant S. Douglas "Doug" Cater proposed that President Johnson brief reporters on the pacification program in Vietnam, but the President warned Cater against doing anything that might upset the government of South Vietnam.

**S. Douglass "Doug" Cater:** I just wanted to check with you. I understand I'm going to be on the press plane in the morning, and I thought it—Bill [D. Moyers] thought, too, that we ought to have a little briefing before so they could file something from San Francisco [California]. I've been working on getting material on the pacification program, which the people out there have been launching. Wondered if that wasn't a good idea to—

**President Johnson:** Yes, if you clear it with [McGeorge "Mac"] Bundy and [Dean] Rusk so that we don't mess up [Henry Cabot] Lodge [Jr.] or [Nguyễn Cao] Kỳ and get them mad or upset. You know how envious and jealous everybody is.

**Cater:** Yes, sir.

**President Johnson:** And I don't think we really have any obligation to take care of a bunch of lazy newspapermen. When there's no news, we don't have to make it. I would—if you had something that was news, and was helpful, and good, and it wouldn't irritate Vietnam. [*Cater acknowledges.*] [Walt W.] Rostow says that everything we announce here for their country looks like they're—we're colonizers.

**Cater:** Oh, yeah. No, that's—

**President Johnson:** And we say here's what we're going to do in the way of teaching, and here's what we're going to do in the way of medicine, here's what we're going to do in other things. So just be sure that it's cleared with Rusk and Bundy—the appropriate people—and see if Bundy clears it with him. And then tell them any and everything you can, as far as I'm concerned.

**Cater:** Well, that's the thing. If I'm on there, they'll be asking me questions. If I have something to tell them, it'll help avoid the questions they ask me.

**President Johnson:** Well, would you rather go on the plane Sunday or just let them go on out there by themselves?

**Cater:** Well, I think if I gave them—for example, Bundy has said that he could get me by early in the morning who is coming and a little background on these people. It would be very useful to give them something, 'cause they're going to be desperate, and otherwise they're going to be speculating about the military aspect of this meeting.

**President Johnson:** They got nothing to speculate there. We've told them that very much it's going to be Lodge and the Chief of State and the Prime Minister, and it's going to be both military and nonmilitary, and we've told them it's agriculture and health and education.

**Cater:** Well, they know I work on health and education, and that's why I thought I could give them a little fill on that.

**President Johnson:** Anything you give them that don't make the government fall is all right with me. Now, you want to bear in mind that Rostow's got a memo up, saying that we announce things in Washington [*Cater acknowledges*] regarding what we're going to do in our satellite Vietnam, that about brings about a coup every time we do it. If you'll read Rostow's memo, if they'll get you that, you can see what you're getting into.

**Cater:** All right, sir.

**President Johnson:** I'm for it. I don't give a damn. You can tell them anything in the world, including who your grandpa was, just tell them as long as you can talk to them till you're sore, suit me fine, provided you don't upset the government.

**Cater:** All right, sir.

**President Johnson:** And you be sure it's cleared with Bundy and the people out there.

**Cater:** Will do.

**President Johnson:** All right.

**Cater:** Bye.

*End of excerpt.*

CITATION: Conversation WH6602-02-9620, 4 February 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.