

WH6401-17-1439_I Can't Ever Make Phi Beta Kappa

Date: 1964-01-20

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Herman E. Talmadge

Start Time: 19:40

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "I Can't Ever Make Phi Beta Kappa"

SCENE SETTER: Speaking with Senator Herman E. Talmadge [D-Georgia], President Johnson asked his opinion of appointing Georgia native and Phi Beta Kappa member W. Tapley Bennett as U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic. Talmadge assured Johnson that Bennett would steer clear of trouble, but Bennett later invited controversy for urging LBJ to send U.S. combat troops to Santo Domingo in April 1965.

President Johnson: Do you know a W. Tapley Bennett from the state of Georgia?

Herman E. Talmadge: Yes. He's [a] good boy.

President Johnson: Would you appoint him as ambassador to the Dominican Republic if you were governor and president?

Talmadge: I wouldn't hesitate one bit. Now, let me tell you a little about his background. I was in college with him, and I was head of the Interfraternity Council and had the votes to elect him editor of the *Pandora* [yearbook] over there. He's a quiet and retiring, unassuming sort of a boy. He's very brilliant. He was a Phi Beta Kappa. His daddy was a rough and rugged countryman—livestock man. He has character and integrity and ability. He'd handle the job well, in my judgment.

President Johnson: He will be appointed, my friend. Thank you and good night.

Talmadge: Thank you, sir.

President Johnson: I wish you'd give me a recommendation like that. I can't ever make Phi Beta Kappa, but, if anybody ever calls you, you speak well of me.

Talmadge: [*amusedly*] Well, I don't know of any Phi Beta Kappas that have made president, so . . .

President Johnson: [*Laughs.*] Well, this one's going to be made ambassador, I'll tell you that, right now.

Talmadge: It has its limitations, but he's a good boy, and I don't think he'll ever do anything to cause you to be ashamed of your appointing [him].

President Johnson: Well, I won't.

CITATION: "Lyndon B. Johnson and Herman E. Talmadge on 20 January 1964," Tape WH6401.17, Citation #1439, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [The Kennedy Assassination and the Transfer of Power]*, vol. 3, ed. Kent B. Germany and Robert David Johnson] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014-). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/9030190>