



## “Go On and Report My Poverty Bill”

**Date:** 1964-06-22

**Conversation:** WH6406-12-3810

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Charles A. Halleck

**Start Time:** 18:24

**Duration:** 05:48

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: Few politicians could match Lyndon B. Johnson’s persuasive powers. In the summer of 1964, passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Economic Opportunity Act required significant cooperation from Republicans in Congress. This spirited back-and-forth conversation with House Minority Leader Charles A. “Charlie” Halleck [R–Indiana] offers an insider’s view of how Johnson got things done.

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**President Johnson:** Well, Charlie, don’t you think I ought to try to get my program passed?

**Charles A. “Charlie” Halleck:** Yes, you do. But I don’t think you can do it—

**President Johnson:** If you were in my place—if you were in my place—

**Halleck:** Now, wait—

**President Johnson:** —and you had a House—

**Halleck:** Wait a minute, Mr. President.

**President Johnson:** —meets on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thur[sday]—

**Halleck:** [*speaking over President Johnson*] You’re not going to do it—you’re not going to do it the week after the 4th of July . . . and ahead of our [Republican National] Convention. I don’t think you are. And I’m—I was about to call you, Mr. President.

**President Johnson:** Well, do it between now and the 4th of July. Get these things passed. You oughtn’t to hold up my poverty bill. That’s a good bill. There’s no reason why you ought to keep a majority from beating it. If you can beat it, go on and beat it, but you oughtn’t to hold it up. You ought to give me a fair shake and give me a chance to vote on it. I’ve got it in my budget.

**Halleck:** Well, [*unclear*]—

**President Johnson:** I've cut my budget a billion under last year.

**Halleck:** Wait a minute. Let me talk [*unclear*] just a minute. You want this civil rights bill through, you want the tax bill through, and I helped you do it. And goddamn it, did I help you on civil rights?

**President Johnson:** Yeah, you sure did. You helped [John F. "Jack"] Kennedy.

**Halleck:** Well, for Christ's sake—

**President Johnson:** You agreed with him.

**Halleck:** —helped Kennedy, and I helped you.

**President Johnson:** That's right.

**Halleck:** Now, wait just a minute, my friend.

**President Johnson:** Then you helped yourself. 'Course you all want civil rights much as we do. I believe it's a nonpartisan bill. I don't think it's a Johnson bill.

**Halleck:** No, no, no, no, no, you're going to get all the political advantage. We aren't going to get a goddamn thing.

**President Johnson:** [*speaking over Halleck*] No . . . no. No, no.

**Halleck:** Wait just a minute. Now, we got a lot of things in that bill, but I don't know what the hell the Senate put in there. Maybe we ought to kind of take a little look at it.

**President Johnson:** Well, maybe you ought to. I'm not saying that you—

**Halleck:** Now, wait a minute, Mr. President. I'm just looking at it hard-boiled. And once in a while I can get hard-boiled.

**President Johnson:** Well, you wouldn't want to go to your convention without a civil rights bill, would you?

**Halleck:** You know, as a matter of fact, if you scratch me very deep, Mr. President . . . I—

**President Johnson:** I wouldn't scratch you at all, 'cause I want to pat you.

**Halleck:** Wait just a minute. Wait just a minute. [*President Johnson chuckles softly.*] If I had my way, I'd let you folks be fussing with that goddamn thing before *your* convention instead of ours. But I'm perfectly willing to give you the right to sign that thing on July 4. Now, I think you're taking advantage of a[n] Independence Day thing that ain't right. But that's not for me to say.

**President Johnson:** I don't know what you're talking about.

**Halleck:** You want to sign this—

**President Johnson:** I haven't heard anything about that. I haven't—I haven't said—

**Halleck:** —civil rights bill on July 4.

**President Johnson:** No.

**Halleck:** Well, the papers have been full of it.

**President Johnson:** I haven't said a word about it. Nobody's asked me anything about it.

**Halleck:** And I'll tell you something: if you sign it that day, I ain't going to be there, 'cause I'm going.

**President Johnson:** All right.

**Halleck:** I'm going. Mr. President, I wish you—what you'd do . . . And God knows I . . . Look, you got a tax bill, you got a civil rights bill, you got a hell of a lot of other things coming along. Don't press us too goddamn hard. I . . . I'll do just about anything I can for you.

**President Johnson:** Well, go on and report my poverty bill. Quit holding it up there in that damn Rules Committee.

**Halleck:** Now, wait just a minute. Let's—we'll get at that—

**President Johnson:** They've had that all debated. They've debated it, they've delayed, they—

**Halleck:** All right, [*unclear*]. If you—if you try to shove that—

**President Johnson:** I'm not trying to shove. Hell, I been trying for six months to even get a vote on it!

**Halleck:** Yeah. Mr.—

**President Johnson:** They held it up over there. I never saw such a spectacle. Every man, they were bitter and mean and vicious and—in the Labor Committee—and then they got it over there, and now they're up testifying in Rules.

**Halleck:** [*speaking under President Johnson*] Well, wait a minute. Now, let's just go back over it a little bit. You've got a great important thing called the civil rights bill, with a hell of a lot of far-reaching amendments. I'm sorry I'm holding you up this much, but I'm just going to do it. A hell of a lot of amendments. You want me to buy those without any chance in the House to look them over. Well, Mr. President, I guess maybe I'll do it, but, Jesus Christ, don't push me too far. Now, give me a little chance—

**President Johnson:** [*speaking over Halleck*] I haven't pushed you at all, my friend. I haven't even discussed it with you.

*End of excerpt 1.*

**Halleck:** Now, wait a minute. I want to pass the civil rights bill. And let me tell you what I want to do: I want to pass—I'm going to help you do it—the civil rights bill as it passed the Senate, understand?

**President Johnson:** You give me a rule on my poverty bill and let me vote on that, Charlie.

**Halleck:** Now, wait just a minute. I'll give you a rule in due time, but don't press me, and don't—

**President Johnson:** I'm not pressing you. I'm just—I'm—

**Halleck:** Goddamn it, Mr. President—

**President Johnson:** I'm not pressing you any more than you're pressing me, my friend. I'm just making a statement. Please—I'm telling you about things I'm interested in, and you want to, I think, be helpful.

**Halleck:** All right, in due time, I'll give you a [rule]. But if you—

**President Johnson:** OK.

**Halleck:** —keep me here . . . I got [unclear] deal. [Unclear]—

**President Johnson:** No, [unclear], Charlie, I want to sure enough try to get it acted on in the Senate. And they don't want to go into working on the bill in the hearings until we act on it in the House. [*speaking over Halleck*] And you could do that; you could let me have that rule tomorrow if you wanted to.

**Halleck:** Just—could I—Look, you're an old Senate hand.

**President Johnson:** Yeah, a[n] old House hand, too.

**Halleck:** Wait a minute. And you're a House man.

**President Johnson:** An old Halleck man.

**Halleck:** All right, [*President Johnson laughs*] and you're a Halleck man, and I'm a Johnson man. But, Christ—

**President Johnson:** [*chuckling*] Give me a little rule up there in the morning.

**Halleck:** —am I glad you called me [*President Johnson laughs*] because, my friend, I just wish I was right there with you.

**President Johnson:** Well, we'll get together this week.

**Halleck:** Let me tell you something.

**President Johnson:** We'll get together this week.

**Halleck:** Mr. President?

**President Johnson:** Yeah?

**Halleck:** Jesus Christ—

**President Johnson:** I'll call you this week, and we'll—

**Halleck:** —us guys—Wait a minute. Us guys in the House have carried the hod for you . . .

**President Johnson:** Well, you call them up and tell them to give me a rule on that poverty bill so I can get it—[unclear comment by Halleck] I've got it over in the Senate, you see?

**Halleck:** All right, now, wait just a minute. I ain't going to give you any rule on the goddamn poverty bill until I know what the hell we're doing.

**President Johnson:** Well . . . well, what can I tell or how can I tell you what we're doing? I'll tell you anything I know. I'll call you any day this week that you're free, and we'll sit down and talk together.

**Halleck:** OK.

**President Johnson:** OK.

**Halleck:** Thank [you].

**President Johnson:** Bye.

*End of excerpt 2.*

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Full information about this conversation: ["Go On and Report My Poverty Bill"](#)