



## “You’re a Hard Bargainer”

**Date:** 1964-06-23

**Conversation:** WH6406-14-3856

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Everett M. Dirksen

**Start Time:** 18:00

**Duration:** 01:21

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: Senate Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen [R-Illinois] had been haggling with Lyndon B. Johnson ever since Johnson’s days as Senate Majority Leader in the 1950s. In this conversation, Dirksen asked the President for help with the Kaskaskia River Navigation Project in a distressed area of Illinois. Johnson in turn asked Dirksen to help him get votes on an excise tax amendment.

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**President Johnson:** Now, you’re not going to beat me on excise taxes and ruin my budget this year. [*Dirksen attempts to interject.*] I’ve got Ways and Means [Committee] holding hearings, and we’re going to come up with a recommendation one way or the other, but don’t beat me on that, now. You can do it if you want to, and you can ruin my budget, but you’re hollering “economy” and trying to balance it, and I cut the deficit 50 percent under what [John F. “Jack”] Kennedy had it. Now, if you screw me up on excise taxes and get that thing going, I’ll have hell. Now, let my Ways and Means Committee—

**Everett M. Dirksen:** Now . . . Now, look at the pressure I’m under.

**President Johnson:** No, you’re not under—

**Dirksen:** [*Unclear*] goddamn trade associations.

**President Johnson:** Well, I know it but, God, you’re also for good fiscal prudence, and you know . . . you know that the way to do this is through the House committee. And you know if you put it in, you’re not going to get it. They’re not going to let y’all write a bill over in the Senate on taxes.

**Dirksen:** I don’t suppose we are.

**President Johnson:** Now, please don’t press me on that.

**Dirksen:** Well, I got to press it [*unclear*]—

**President Johnson:** Well, who you going to take? You going to take all your Republicans? Give me one or two of them and let them be prudent. You got people on there that can . . .

**Dirksen:** Well, you got enough votes to beat it.

**President Johnson:** No, I haven't. I haven't. You can beat me, and [*Dirksen acknowledges*] if you . . . you oughtn't to do it. And you see how I'm—how you're going to let me win by one vote in there, and I'll call you back in a little bit on this.

**Dirksen:** You never talked that way when you were sitting in that front seat.

**President Johnson:** Yeah, well, I did—

**Dirksen:** You always [*unclear*].

**President Johnson:** —I did if my country's involved. I voted for [Dwight D.] Ike [Eisenhower] one time when [William F. "Bill"] Knowland voted against him. I cast the vote on his foreign aid and brought it out of the committee.

**Dirksen:** You're a hard bargainer.

**President Johnson:** And—No, I'm not.

**Dirksen:** Yes, you are.

**President Johnson:** But you just take care of [*unclear*]. And I'll look at this, and see what I can do, and call you right back.

**Dirksen:** All right.

*End of excerpt.*

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CITATION: "Lyndon Johnson and Everett Dirksen on 23 June 1964," Tape WH6406.14, Citation #3856, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Mississippi Burning and the Passage of the Civil Rights Act, vol. 8, ed. Kent B. Germany and David C. Carter] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/9080030>

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Full information about this conversation: ["You're a Hard Bargainer"](#)