



## “They Can’t Argue with Themselves”

**Date:** 1964-09-09

**Conversation:** WH6409-08-5542

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** W. Willard Wirtz

**Start Time:** 10:34

**Duration:** 02:23

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson and Secretary of Labor W. Willard “Bill” Wirtz discussed a rhetorical strategy for the last two months of the presidential campaign. Johnson advised Wirtz to “do all the speaking you can” but to avoid arguing with Republican candidate Sen. Barry M. Goldwater Sr. of Arizona and his running mate, Rep. William E. Miller of New York.

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**W. Willard “Bill” Wirtz:** I’ve got two speeches tomorrow before the [United] Mine Workers [of America] and the [International Association of] Machinists [and Aerospace Workers]. I face the question—we’ve got a lot of stuff in which we’ve found [William E.] Miller [R–New York] off base. Also [Barry M.] Goldwater [Sr.] [R–Arizona], 60,000 misfits in the army. Miller on this immigration, and so on, and so forth. Now, my own personal reaction is right now that we’ve got nothing to gain by my arguing with Miller or Goldwater.

**President Johnson:** I wouldn’t, and I’ve asked my Cabinet people, “Please, don’t do it.” They do it. [Orville L.] Freeman and [Stewart L.] Udall do it, but I sure wouldn’t. I’d be above them if I were you, and I’d talk about what we stand for [*Wirtz acknowledges throughout*], and what we are doing, and what the workers are doing, and how the industry’s working with us. And I’d try to put them all under one tent and be the leader of everybody instead of yip-yakking at them, ’cause you get down there, and you just advertise them. And they have trouble making an argument if we don’t argue with them.

**Wirtz:** That’s my—

**President Johnson:** They can’t argue with themselves.

**Wirtz:** —my own instinct completely.

**President Johnson:** And you—I think on your backlash thing, the figures: New Haven last night shows us 34 percent frontlash and 7 percent backlash, and shows [John F. “Jack”] Kennedy carried New Haven by 65 [percent], and we’re carrying it by 77. That’s anti-Goldwater stuff. And that’s Oliver [A. “Ollie”] Quayle [III] called them in. They just finished a survey for the mayor up in New Haven, Connecticut. And we’re finishing one in Pennsylvania this week. And we think that if we’ll just talk about the danger of a woman having a two-headed baby and men [*Wirtz acknowledges*] becoming

sterile and drinking contaminated milk and these things, that they'll know who they ought to be scared of without our ever saying so. And that's the thing we ought to keep up.

**Wirtz:** OK. John [D.] Pomfret [Jr.], *New York Times*, is just back from Gary [Indiana], where he's done a special study, which I asked him to do, frankly, on the [*President Johnson acknowledges*] backlash. He said he can't find any of it even there now.

**President Johnson:** Well, [George H.] Gallup's coming out this week with a 7 percent over the nation, and that's mostly Mississippi and Alabama [*Wirtz acknowledges throughout*] when you spread it out. But the frontlash, I am getting 2 percent more Republican votes in New Haven, Connecticut, than Goldwater, 34–32. [*Chuckles.*]

**Wirtz:** Sure. Sure.

**President Johnson:** That's unthinkable, isn't it? [*speaking over Wirtz*] Republicans, I'm talking about now, not Democrats.

**Wirtz:** If it's not presumptuous, I think even the frontlash thing we could start forgetting about as a phrase.

**President Johnson:** [*speaking over Wirtz*] I think that's right, but . . . That's right. But if they insist on bringing it in [*Wirtz acknowledges throughout*], we ought to just say, "Well, let's balance them off. If you want to talk about people that are turning their backs that claim to be Democrats and leaving it, it's less than 10 percent. And those that are Republicans are about 30 percent."

**Wirtz:** Yeah.

*End of excerpt.*

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CITATION: Conversation WH6409-08-5542, 9 September 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

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