



## “\$400 Million’s Not Going to Separate Us”

**Date:** 1965-03-23

**Conversation:** WH6503-11-7141

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Wilbur D. Mills

**Start Time:** 16:54

**Duration:** 02:43

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: While discussing the just-reported Medicare bill with House Ways and Means Committee chair Wilbur D. Mills [D–Arkansas], President Johnson explained his willingness to spend more on the program than previously planned, arguing that “\$400 million’s not going to separate us friends when it’s for health.”

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**Wilbur D. Mills:** The only thing I’m concerned about—and I’m very frank about it—is that there’s about 450 million dollars in this bill out of the general funds of the Treasury for which you haven’t budgeted your situation.

**President Johnson:** Yeah, but I’ll take care of that. I’ll do that. You see what I’ve done, Wilbur. This will not hold for the rest of the year, but the first eight months, by constant Cabinet pressure, by withholding, and just threatening, and ultimatum, and being meaner than you or Harry [F.] Byrd [Sr.] [D–Virginia], I am under this year, the first eight months, a billion, 800 million [dollars] [Mills acknowledges], under what you appropriated and what I said I’d spend.

**Mills:** Well, that’s good.

**President Johnson:** Now, I think that I’ll at least get down to where I’ll be 4[00] or 500 million under that. That’s number one. Number two, my deficit in the budget I sent you [in] January, is a billion dollars under my deficit *last* year. And I’ve reduced the deficit 1 billion dollars. Now, I think that we can—when they asked me about, said, “Do you want to put in 4[00] or 500 million?” What did I say about it? And I said, “Well, you tell him we had an old judge in Texas one time. We called him Alcalde—[Oran M.] Old Alcalde Roberts. And he said, when they talked to him one time, and [unclear] might have [unclear] the Constitution, he said, ‘Well, what’s the Constitution between friends?’” And I say, “Tell Wilbur that 400 million’s not going to separate us friends when it’s for health, when it’s for sickness, because . . . there’s a greater demand, and I know it, and for this bill than all my other programs put together.” [Mills acknowledges.] I know that. And it’ll last longer.

*End of excerpt.*

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Full information about this conversation: ["\\$400 Million's Not Going to Separate Us"](#)