

## WH6408-27-5008-5009\_scroller

**Date:** 1964-08-17

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Dean Rusk

**Start Time:** 20:10

**Place:** Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "A Very, Very Ambitious Young Man"

SCENE SETTER: When President Johnson announced that he would not select any member of his Cabinet as his vice-presidential running mate for the 1964 election, Attorney General Robert F. "Bobby" Kennedy decided to resign and run for a U.S. Senate seat from New York. Here, Johnson discussed Kennedy's plans with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who admitted, "I just can't wrap my mind around that kind of ambition."

**Dean Rusk:** Well, [*clears throat*] I have thought that I knew, and I certainly can pin this down if there's any doubt about it, that what [W. Averell] Harriman's been working on is this New York ploy for [Robert F.] Bobby [Kennedy].

**President Johnson:** Yeah, he has. He has.

**Rusk:** He's been working on that very hard, and I connected this reception—I read this in the newspaper; I haven't talked to Averell about it today—I connected that reception with a send-off for Bobby in New York.

**President Johnson:** May be it, may be it, may be it.

**Rusk:** Yeah, but I certainly can—

**President Johnson:** No, I don't think—I think we just ride it out and just watch it.

**Rusk:** Yeah.

**President Johnson:** I think it's a good thing, though, for him to keep us informed, not necessarily me, but—

**Rusk:** Right.

**President Johnson:** Because he might not want to, but he might—I think he ought to keep you informed [*Rusk acknowledges*] with what he's doing, because . . . this is a very, very ambitious young man. And you just—it's unbelievable how ambitious he is.

**Rusk:** Well, Mr. President, I commented to [*unclear*] today that I just can't wrap my mind around that kind of ambition. I don't know how to understand it.

**President Johnson:** I don't either. [*Unclear.*]

**Rusk:** This consuming passion is something that's just alien to my whole makeup.

**President Johnson:** Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

**Rusk:** It's—there's a ruthlessness about it that [*President Johnson attempts to interject*] just scares the hell out of me.

**President Johnson:** Well, it is to me, too. It just—and if you'd see what's requested. For instance, he called me up at the [LBJ] Ranch and demanded—just *demande*d—that I send in the Internal Revenue [Service] agents all over Mississippi.

**Rusk:** Yeah, yeah.

**President Johnson:** And I just got shocked by it, and then the things he said about . . . Well, anyway, maybe it'll work out [in] the next few days. I hope we get through this convention without any trouble. I'm very fearful that, if you'll see the columns and everything—the last two days I've spent half my time denying to the columns that I have abandoned the Kennedy machine; I've thrown it overboard. Now, whatever it is, I don't know.

*End of excerpt.*

CITATION: Conversation WH6408-27-5008-5009, 17 August 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.