

WH6411-08-6230_scroller

Date: 1964-11-05

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: John W. McCormack

Start Time: 14:22

Place: LBJ Ranch

SCROLLER TITLE: "We've Got to Work Our Will"

SCENE SETTER: In this postelection conversation about legislative strategy, President Johnson conferred with Speaker of the House John W. McCormack [D–Massachusetts] about House Rules Committee chair Howard W. "Judge" Smith [D–Virginia], who had repeatedly blocked legislation from coming to the House floor. Their remedy would be the 21-Day Rule, which allowed the full House to consider a bill if Smith had not granted a rule within three weeks of the relevant committee's request.

President Johnson: I'd just sure get that list up, and let's talk about it next week or so, 'cause I think if you get these 40 new men in there, I guess you'll lose 40 in the South, and you can probably [*a telephone rings in the background*]*—*[Charles A.] Charlie [Halleck] [R–Indiana] can keep 100 of his, but you can outvote him. And we ought to—when you adopt those rules, we ought to stop all this foolishness about not getting a bill to conference without Howard [W. "Judge"] Smith's [D–Virginia] consent.

John W. McCormack: Exactly.

President Johnson: And we just oughtn't to have to go around begging like me and you did this last year. It's just not [*McCormack acknowledges*]*—*the President and the Speaker are above that, and we just might as well put it on the line or get out.

McCormack: Exactly. I—

President Johnson: Ain't no use having the people vote for you and then turn it over to him without a fight.

McCormack: I agree.

President Johnson: So I just think that—I know what [Lewis] Lew [Deschler] and some of these boys are awful cautious, and so forth. But I just feel like that . . . Mr. [Samuel T. "Sam"] Rayburn used to say to me, about the Senate, he said that you, "I like you to be deliberate, and I know that you think that [you] ought to be allowed to talk. But," he said, "the body has got to be able to work its will. And it may not work it in an hour, but it's got to be able to work it in a day or a week."

Now, we've got to work our will, and you can't work your will when Howard Smith can keep a bill from going to conference, or [Harold Royce "H. R."] Gross [R–Iowa] can stop it. You can't work your will when the free people of the United States give you a 15 million mandate and you can't even get up a bill, and the Speaker has to go around and beg and pat backs, and the President has to call and talk to Mrs. [Katharine Price Collier] St. George [R–New York], and stuff like that. It's just not right, and we ought to get a three-weeks rule, or a two-weeks calendar, or something else. And you got to— whoever you put on that Rules Committee, I'd put old Claude [D.] Pepper [D–Florida], 'cause, by God, he's a fighter. And I was in Florida with him, and he helped us carry Florida.

McCormack: Well, I told you—

President Johnson: Yeah, I know, we talked about it.

McCormack: —who I had in mind.

President Johnson: Yeah, I know, we talked about it.

McCormack: That's agreeable to you?

President Johnson: Yes, sir. You're damn right. It's wonderful to me. He's a McCormack man; he's a Johnson man; he's a Democrat.

McCormack: He is. And he's American.

President Johnson: Yes, he bet he is, and . . . I'd just get it all done at one time. These people in these 45 states, now, 44 states, the District of Columbia, they didn't vote for Howard Smith.

McCormack: No.

President Johnson: And they—he's a good man, and he's an able man, but he's representing another century, and [Barry M.] Goldwater [Sr.] [R–Arizona] represented his viewpoint. And they got six states.

McCormack: Exactly.

President Johnson: And the people, 15 million of them, say they want to move ahead.

McCormack: That's correct.

President Johnson: And if we don't move with them, they're going to move over us.

McCormack: That's right.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: "Lyndon Johnson and John McCormack on 5 November 1964," Conversation WH6411-08-6230, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [The Election of 1964]*, vol. 2, ed. Kent B. Germany, et al.] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–).