

WH6508-10-8620_scroller

Date: 1965-08-23

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: John W. McCormack

Start Time: 15:30

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "He Ought to Be Removed"

SCENE SETTER: In this conversation with Speaker of the House John W. McCormack [D–Massachusetts], President Johnson explained his veto of a bill that would have given Congress 120 days to review the closure of military bases. Johnson also complained about the irresponsible comments made by the bill's sponsor, House Armed Services Committee chair L. Mendel Rivers [D–South Carolina], about U.S. policy toward China.

President Johnson: If he [L. Mendel Rivers] [D–South Carolina] wants another veto, and he wants another funds impounded, and if he wants to take me on and the admiral of Charleston Navy Yard, by God, if he wants a war, he can have one. Now, he's just been—

John W. McCormack: Well, I think he—

President Johnson: He's been playing with [Robert S. "Bob"] McNamara. McNamara doesn't know how to fight, but I've got a good sharp knife, and I'm going to cut off his peter. [*McCormack laughs.*] John, tell him this now: just tell him that he's getting too big for his britches. [*McCormack attempts to interject.*] That I'm going to cut off his peter and poke it in my pocket, as Mr. [Samuel T. "Sam"] Rayburn used to say. And I served with Mendel a long time, and I don't trust him as the greatest tactician, and he's already damn near ruined me by ordering to bomb Peking. And now those congressmen got to have some responsibility. I don't care how much seniority they got; they're Americans. And the damn fool that's out here advocating bombing Peking ain't got no business being chairman of a committee. He ought to be removed. Man ought to be expelled that advocates bombing Peking with the situation as terrible as it is right now. And so you just going to have to talk to him. If you can't do it, I'm going to send for him and talk to him myself.

Now, I talked to him night before last, and he was so thrilled, because I'd signed his pay bill. "Oh," he said, "we'll work this out." Said, "I don't want any trouble. I want to get along with you. I'm ready to do it." But they tell me they've met with him three or four times this morning, and he's just trying to rave and rant and throw his weight around. And—

McCormack: Did you talk with him the other night?

President Johnson: Yes, sir! He's one of the first men I called. And I said, "I got two bills here; I'm going to sign one of them." It's wrong to sign it. He cost us 600 million dollars. And you ought to [have] gone down that well, and Carl [B.] Albert [D–Oklahoma] ought to, and [Gerald R.] Jerry Ford [R–Michigan] ought to, and you ought to say, "This is fiscal irresponsibility." But we went ahead and passed it unanimously, 414 to nothing. It cost us 600 extry million, and most of it's wasted. Didn't go to the people it ought to go to at all. It goes to people that we don't need in the service. We need the specialists, the electronic people, but I signed that bill, and I told him so. "Now," I said, "on the other one, I can't go along with that, 'cause you ruin the whole Defense establishment. And I'm just not going to ruin the country because—even—if the Congress and the House and Senate don't know any better." Now, most of the Senate didn't even know what was in the bill, 'cause they didn't have anything like this in the bill. This was the crazy committee over there. So when I talked to the

senators, I haven't found a one of them that even knew what was in the bill. And that's a sad thing to say, but that's true.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: Conversation WH6508-10-8620, 23 August 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.