

“One Last Bit of Advice”

Date: 1971-12-10

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: William H. Rehnquist

Start Time: 17:18

Place: White House Telephone

President Nixon spoke with newly appointed U.S. Supreme Court justice William H. Rehnquist and offered the judge some final advice before he joined the bench. “Don’t let the fact that you were under heat change any of your views,” he said, and don’t “let the Washington social set change you.”

President Nixon: Well, you must feel like Chief Justice [Charles Evans] Hughes. He had 26 voting against him, too.

William H. “Bill” Rehnquist: Is that the exact number?

President Nixon: Fifty-two to 26. I just got it in front of me, so you can go out and say, “Well, like Hughes, I had 26 against.” [*Unclear*] you had 68 for.

Rehnquist: Gee, you’re a much better—

President Nixon: Yeah. There’s only one thing, though. I’ve just damn near withdrew your nomination before, because I [was] just talking to John [B.] Connally, and he showed me an article by [Joseph C.] Joe Kraft endorsing you, and I said, “I’ve made a mistake.”

Rehnquist: [*Laughs.*]

President Nixon: Yeah.

Rehnquist: Listen, I can’t tell you how much I [*President Nixon acknowledges throughout*] appreciate your giving me this opportunity.

President Nixon: Well, this is a great thing for—to have such a—to be such a young man to go on the court. You’ll make a great record and, you know, the very fact that . . . the only thing—I’ll give you one—only one last bit of advice, because you’re going to be independent, naturally, and that is, don’t let the fact that you were under heat change any of your views. Yeah.

Rehnquist: I’ll remember that, Mr. President.

President Nixon: Don’t ever let—I told Warren [E.] Burger that. I said, “Now, Warren,” you know, ’cause—[*unclear*] he didn’t get much heat, but I said, “just don’t come down here”—the way I put it to him—and . . . let the Washington social set change you.”

Rehnquist: Well—

President Nixon: So . . . just be as mean and rough as they said you were. OK?

Rehnquist: [*Laughs.*] Thanks, Mr. President.

President Nixon: All right, but just . . . good luck. Bye.

Rehnquist: Thanks a lot. Bye.

End of excerpt.

“Richard M. Nixon and William H. Rehnquist on 10 December 1971,” Conversation 016-086, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.