



## “You’re Goddamn Sure Going to Serve”

**Date:** 1963-11-29

**Conversation:** K6311-05-07 and K6311-06-14-15-16

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Richard B. Russell Jr.

**Start Time:** 16:05 and 20:55

**Duration:** 04:25

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: In two conversations on 29 November 1963, President Johnson entreated Sen. Richard B. “Dick” Russell Jr. [D–Georgia] to serve on the commission investigating the assassination of John F. “Jack” Kennedy. Russell opposed working alongside the head of the commission, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and declined the President’s request. Johnson persisted and announced the members of the Warren Commission on this day, informing Russell of his inclusion after the fact.

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**President Johnson:** Now, here’s who I’m going to try to get on it. I don’t know—I don’t think I can get any member of the [Supreme] Court . . . I’m going to try to. I’m going to try to get Allen [W.] Dulles. I’m going to try to get Senator Russell and Senator [John Sherman] Cooper [R–Kentucky] from the Senate.

**Richard B. “Dick” Russell Jr.:** Oh, no, no. Get somebody else, now—

**President Johnson:** Yeah, I know, wait a minute now. I want to try—

**Russell:** I haven’t got time.

**President Johnson:** —[to] get [Gerald R.] Jerry Ford [Jr.] [R–Michigan]. It’s not going to take much time. But we got to have [a] states’ rights man or somebody that the country has confidence in. And I’m going to have—[T. Hale] Boggs [Sr.] [D–Louisiana] has entered a resolution over there, and I haven’t talked to anybody about the membership but you. But I would think that Ford and Boggs would be pretty good; they’re both pretty young men, and—

**Russell:** They’re both solid citizens.

**President Johnson:** —and I think that Cooper’s a Republican, and you’re a good states’ rights man. I think it might get John [J.] McCloy and Allen Dulles, and maybe somebody from the [Supreme] Court.

*End of K6311-05-07 excerpt 1.*

**President Johnson:** Who would be the best one if I didn't get the Chief [Justice]? I understand none of the Court—

**Russell:** Well . . . No, no, you wouldn't want [Tom C.] Clark hardly.

**President Johnson:** —I understand none of the Court—No, we can't have a Texan.

**Russell:** No, that's what I said; that'd disqualify him.

**President Johnson:** [J. Edgar] Hoover tells me all three of these shots were aimed for the President [John F. "Jack" Kennedy]. And that this telescopic sight would bring this thing up where you could shoot a man with it as easy as you'd get a man sitting talking to you.

**Russell:** I thought it was just a seven-dollar-and-a-half thing.

**President Johnson:** Well, it was a 21-dollar gun. But he said he looked through the telescopic sight himself, and he said, "Mr. President, I could hit a man on that street going 20 miles an hour as easy as I could hit you sitting talking to you." That's his language. [*Pause.*] OK. Now, I—

**Russell:** Well, I—really, Mr. President, unless you—

**President Johnson:** Well, I'm—

**Russell:** —unless you really think it'd be of some benefit—

**President Johnson:** Yeah, I know it would be—

**Russell:** —[*unclear*] see it'd save my life, I declare, I don't want to serve on that [*unclear*].

**President Johnson:** I know you don't want to do anything, but I want you to. And I think that this is important enough, and you'll see why.

*End of K6311-05-07 excerpt 2.*

**Russell:** Well, now, Mr. President, I know I don't have to tell you of my devotion to you, but I just can't serve on that commission. I'm highly honored you'd think about me in connection with it. But I couldn't serve there with Chief Justice Warren. I don't like that man, and . . . I don't have any confidence in him, though I realize he's a much greater man in the United States nearly—today than almost anyone. And so you get John [C.] Stennis [D—Mississippi], he's a . . .

**President Johnson:** Dick, it's already been announced, and you can serve with anybody for the good of America. And this is a question that has a good many more ramifications than's on the surface, and they're—we got to take this out of the arena where they're testifying it's [Nikita S.] Khrushchev and [Fidel A.] Castro did this and did that, and that—kicking us into a war that can kill 40 million Americans in an hour. And you'd put on your uniform in a minute.

Now, the reason I asked Warren is because he's the Chief Justice of this country, and we've got to have the highest judicial people we can have. The reason I ask you is because you have that same kind of temperament, and you can do anything for your country. And don't go to giving me that kind of stuff about you can't serve with anybody. You can do anything.

**Russell:** Well, see, it's not only that. I just—I don't think the Chief Justice should have served on it.

**President Johnson:** Well . . . [*Russell attempts to interject*] Chief Justice ought to do anything he can to save America. And right now, we've got a very touchy thing, and you wait till you look at this evidence. And you wait till you look at this [Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI]] report. Now, don't just—I'm not going to lead you wrong, and you're not going to be an Old Dog Tray—

**Russell:** You know that I have never—

**President Johnson:** —you're not going to be in Old Dog Tray company, but—

**Russell:** —I have never—I have never—

**President Johnson:** —you never turned your country down—

**Russell:** [*Unclear*] for you that I could, when I could—

**President Johnson:** Well, this is not me; this is your country. And [*reading aloud*] “the members of the Special Commission are Chief Justice Warren, Senator Richard Russell”—and I go right down the list. Now, I've got Allen Dulles and John McCloy, but you've got—you're my man on that commission. And you're going to do it! And don't tell me what you can do and what you can't, because . . . I can't arrest you. And I'm not going to put the FBI on you. But you're goddamn sure going to serve, I'll tell you that!

*End of K6311-06-14-15-16 excerpt.*

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CITATION: “Lyndon Johnson and Richard Russell on 29 November 1963,” Tape K6311.05, PNO 7; and “Lyndon Johnson and Richard Russell (President Johnson joined by Albert Moursund) on 29 November 1963,” Tape K6311.06, PNOs 14, 15, and 16, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [The Kennedy Assassination and the Transfer of Power, vol. 1, ed. Max Holland] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URLs: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/9010161>; <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/9010184>

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