



## “He’s for Grandma”

**Date:** 1963-12-14

**Conversation:** K6312-08-38-39

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Walter W. Heller

**Start Time:** 13:40

**Duration:** 03:34

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: In advance of speaking with journalists about economic considerations for the coming year, Walter W. Heller, chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, sought President Johnson’s advice on how he might answer questions about key proposals and initiatives. Johnson took the opportunity to explain his economic and political philosophy to Heller, highlighting his credentials as a cost-conscious liberal.

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**Walter W. Heller:** Third, I had some indication that one of them might ask, “Well, now, President Johnson is for the tax cut, but is that just because he thinks it’s”—and you know how nasty they can be—“just because he thinks it’s a good thing to prevent a recession between now and the election, or is that part of a fiscal policy designed to, in an active way, to make full use of the economy’s potential and to compensate for gaps in the private economy?”

**President Johnson:** [*talking on speakerphone*] I’d say the latter.

**Heller:** OK. Fine. Those are the three things that I—

**President Johnson:** I’d say, “He’s been for it since the day it was first announced. He participated in the formulation of the bill, [*Heller acknowledges throughout*] and he sat in on all of the meetings. And he’s made speeches all over the country about it, perhaps more than anybody in the administration. He’s no Johnny-come-lately . . . to it.” “Now, why is he cutting these expenses?” “He’s cutting the waste and the things that he need not do in order he has some money to do the things that he does need to do, and he may take out a[n] antiquated installation where they’re teaching somebody to fly a plane that’ll never be flown, that we’ll need a missile instead, in order to help grandma or somebody in West Virginia or Tennessee that’s not eating now.”

**Heller:** Right.

**President Johnson:** “Faced [*with a choice*] between a[n] installation and grandma, he’s for grandma.”

**Heller:** [*Chuckles.*] Yeah, that’s very good. And, of course, that follows the theme on that *Today* show also, which used that kind of an illustration.

**President Johnson:** Tell them I've never agreed that you had to prove you're liberal by showing how much money you could throw away. I have always supported WPA [Works Progress Administration/Work Projects Administration], and PWA [Public Works Administration], and river development, and resource development, and full [manpower and resource] utilization, and public housing, and everything else.

**Heller:** Right.

**President Johnson:** I never supported corruption in any of those things, I never supported waste in any of them, and I never supported just throwing away common sense in operating them. I believe in . . . I'm a kind of a Harold [L.] Ickes liberal.

**Heller:** Well, and, of course, you know, Paul [H.] Douglas [D-Illinois] has done a lot of work to make economy in government respectable, and—

**President Johnson:** That's right. I just point out Harold Ickes and Paul Douglas are some of the greatest liberals we've got. And [E. William "Bill"] Proxmire [D-Wisconsin]. They don't believe in throwing money away.

**Heller:** Yeah . . . right.

**President Johnson:** And you don't know whether either one would like to be compared to the other or not, but . . . [Heller laughs] there's a strange pattern in that regard as far as you're concerned. I've been . . . this is no Johnny-come-lately. I—on the Naval Affairs Committee, in 1938, I was running an investigation pointing up waste in the [U.S.] Navy. In 1948, I was appointed up in the Senate as head of the Preparedness Committee. And I've done this stuff for 12, 15 years in the Senate.

**Heller:** Right.

**President Johnson:** I've had 25 years pointing up waste. And that's all I'm doing in the federal government.

**Heller:** Right.

**President Johnson:** But that doesn't mean that we're not going to have a National Science Foundation, and that [Heller attempts to interject] doesn't mean we're not going to have an Appalachian program, and that doesn't mean that we're not going to have a better program for the Peace Corps. What it does mean is we're going to have less money wasted and more money available for those things because of the stopping the waste!

**Heller:** Right. Well, that's exactly . . . something I want to stress, and—

**President Johnson:** There may be a lot of thirsty people wanting water, but that doesn't mean that you ought to turn on the hydrant and let the tank all run dry before you put a bucket under it.

**Heller:** Right.

**President Johnson:** What we're doing is we're going to put a bucket under it and save all we can.

*End of excerpt.*

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