



## “This Is What We Stand For”

**Date:** 1964-01-28

**Conversation:** WH6401-23-1601

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Hubert H. Humphrey Jr.

**Start Time:** 18:15

**Duration:** 03:00

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson congratulated Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey Jr. [DFL–Minnesota] on a recent pro-Democratic statement to the press and offered his take on the differences between Democrats and Republicans. Humphrey, the Senate Majority Whip, was widely perceived as a front-runner for the 1964 vice-presidential nomination and had emerged as the administration’s most effective defender in the upper chamber.

---

**President Johnson:** Now, this ought to be the party line: [*Humphrey acknowledges throughout*] We ought to turn the other cheek. We ought to just say, “Well, the reason the Republicans haven’t won any elections except [Dwight D.] Eisenhower—and Eisenhower didn’t mess around with this trash; he was a national hero—but the reason they haven’t won one since [Herbert C.] Hoover [Sr.] is because they spend all their time on [Franklin D.] Roosevelt’s boy [James] Jimmy [Roosevelt II], and on his dog [Fala]. And they spend all their time on [Harry S.] Truman and [M.] Margaret [Truman] and the music critics. And they spend all their time on [John F. “Jack”] Kennedy and his religion and other things. And they just haven’t won one. And if they don’t stand for something—”

Hell, if they just come out here and talk about the revival of the corn tassel or come out for Tom Watson watermelons, it’d be something. But they’re just, [*Humphrey chuckles*] by God, against things, [*Humphrey acknowledges*] against everything and trying to smear and fear. And that—you have no alternative.

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* man asked me today, said, “What Republican frightens you the most?” I said, “Well, not any of them now. When one of them comes out and said, ‘This is what I stand for,’ and gives me a foreign policy and said, ‘Here’s what I’m for,’ and then he gives me a domestic policy and said, ‘Here’s what I’m for. Here’s what I’m for in the field of education, in the field of manpower, in the field of training, in the field of civil rights,’ then I’ll get scared. Because even if it’s different from mine, they’ll have a choice. But now they haven’t any choice, because we’re the only ones that stand for anything. They’re just against things.”

**Hubert H. Humphrey Jr.:** Yes. Well, I think we can rack these boys. I’ve had a talk with some of our senators back here about our plans on this tax bill, and we’ll dominate this—we’ll dominate the weekend. And that’s the important thing where I felt that we’d get a good start with Thursday, Friday, Saturday. We’ll have enough stuff here to really have control of the news items.

**President Johnson:** You tell people like Gale [W.] McGee [D–Wyoming] and Frank [E. “Ted”] Moss [D–Utah] and others that we’re really going to help.

**Humphrey:** Yes, sir.

**President Johnson:** Just say, “Now, damn it, boys, you get here and get your speech and ask some questions here and get your name in the paper here.” [*Humphrey acknowledges throughout.*] And every damn one of them ought to take your line that what we are . . . “We’re for war on poverty, we’re for economic growth, we’re for world peace, we’re for security, we’re for Medicare, we’re for human dignity, we’re for human rights. Now, this is what we stand for: a government of strength, a government that’s solvent, and a government that’s compassionate.”

**Humphrey:** Yes, sir.

**President Johnson:** And it just makes these guys look silly.

**Humphrey:** Yes, sir.

**President Johnson:** OK. I just wanted to congratulate you. [*Humphrey attempts to interject.*] I was reading it; it was the best thing I’d seen all day. Goddamn it, I had Indonesia, and I had Panama, and I had Cyprus. And they’re coming in tonight, 7:30. The British are trying to shove us in there [Cyprus] overnight, and I guess we got to go. But I’m trying my damndest to get the Turks to agree not to invade, so we can hold off for another day or two.

**Humphrey:** [*softly*] I hope so. I hope so. [*speaking louder*] Well, I just got back here after we’d had that little visit over there. These press boys were all waiting up here to see me, so I just let them have it.

**President Johnson:** Well, you just ought to hit it tomorrow. Just every day you ought to say, “The Democratic Party is the one party left for America, ’cause the other fellows don’t stand for anything.”

**Humphrey:** That’s right.

**President Johnson:** I just—God, pity them, for they know not what they do. I just feel sorry for them, because what do they stand for?

*End of excerpt.*

---

CITATION: “Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey on 28 January 1964,” Tape WH6401.23, Citation #1601, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [The Kennedy Assassination and the Transfer of Power, vol. 3, ed. Kent B. Germany and Robert David Johnson] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/9030293>

This conversation was transcribed by the [Miller Center’s Presidential Recordings Program](#) with the generous support of the [National Historical Publications and Records Commission](#).

Full information about this conversation: [“This Is What We Stand For”](#)