



“We Can Pass Medicare”

Date: 1964-11-09

Conversation: WH6411-14-6306-6307

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Carl B. Albert

Start Time: 12:20

Duration: 02:59

Place: LBJ Ranch

SCENE SETTER: Shortly after the 1964 election, President Johnson and House Majority Leader Carl B. Albert [D–Oklahoma] discussed the implications of the Democrats’ landslide victory for vacancies on the crucial Ways and Means Committee and for the prospects of reporting and eventually passing the Medicare bill.

Carl B. Albert: And now there’s one other thing, which I think could be real important, and that is: there are three vacancies on Ways and Means [Committee]. [*President Johnson quietly acknowledges.*] And all these fellows are thinking in terms of giving us two of them and the Republicans one, which would be 17–8. And that, of course, would give us control on Medicare, which we need. But there’s a danger of the depletion thing getting out of hand on that. That’s got to be watched real close. And I don’t believe the Speaker [of the House]’s going to be too interested in that phase, though.

President Johnson: You better just tell him that “that’s something that you *got* to be interested in.”

Albert: And whether he’s—well, he’s pretty hefty now on . . . He told me, he said, “We got to liberalize these rules. We may never have another chance.” But we could go too far and hurt the Democratic Party [*President Johnson quietly acknowledges*] in many areas of the country, I think. I hope I can talk to him about that. But I just wanted you to know that. If they add two members, we want to be darn sure that we get somebody. Now, I don’t know, I was thinking about maybe [Edmond A.] Ed Edmondson [D–Oklahoma]. Now, he’d be a good one, because he’d go with you on everything, except that one thing. [*Unclear*]—

President Johnson: I’d just demand him, then, if I were you.

Albert: I think we should. Although they may take it away from us. This is going to be a wild bunch.

End of excerpt 1.

Albert: I do think this Ways and Means thing, and I think this purging, too, ought to be looked at long and solid before we make up our minds we’re going to do it. And I have talked to the Speaker. I

found him very much inclined to push for strong liberalization and to give this thing the [John W.] McCormack [D–Massachusetts] image just as fast he can, as of a strong, liberal approach to the modification of the rules. And, now, the 21-day rule liberalization, I think, is—will probably take the form of giving the Speaker the authority after 21 days to recognize the chairman of the committee or any other member. If we have that, why, of course, it won't matter, then, whether [Wilbur D.] Mills [D–Arkansas] is for Medicare or not. Now, we can pass Medicare. [There] isn't any question about that. We can pass it by discharge petition if we have to. And I think Mills will give. I think he'll see defeat. If he doesn't, he's not as smart as I think he is.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: Conversation WH6411-14-6306-6307, 9 November 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

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Full information about this conversation: [“We Can Pass Medicare”](#)