



“We Got a Fair Chance to Keep Up”

Date: 1965-03-23

Conversation: WH6503-11-7135

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: John L. McClellan

Start Time: 10:05

Duration: 01:25

Place: Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: Before discussing civil rights concerns and presidential appointments with Sen. John L. McClellan [D–Arkansas], President Johnson reminisced about his early role with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). *Gemini 3* had launched that morning from Cape Canaveral, just days after Moscow’s launch of a manned space flight that had ascended to an earth orbit higher than any the Americans had yet reached.

President Johnson: Hello?

John L. McClellan: Hello?

President Johnson: Hello, John. How are you?

McClellan: Fine, Mr. President. How are you this morning?

President Johnson: Pretty good, John.

McClellan: Looks like we had a big event down at Cape Canaveral [Florida] a while ago.

President Johnson: Well, we’re watching it. We hope it works out all right. We got a long ways to go, and these boys [the Soviets] are kind of running rings around us, but we don’t get hot until we get real behind. Then we start looking for somebody to make a scapegoat out of.

McClellan: Yeah. Well . . .

President Johnson: [*Chuckles.*] We—[Richard B.] Dick Russell [Jr.] [D–Georgia] called me when *Sputnik 1* went up and said, “My God, you got to go to Washington. I cannot go up there and hold these hearings, but somebody’s got to.” And we just played hell, and we were behind. Then we started getting caught up, and then Congress started raising questions, but we—we’ve got everything we asked for in a manned spaceflight, and we think that we got a fair chance to keep up with these people by ’70.

McClellan: Well, we should keep up. [*Unclear*]—

President Johnson: All this research—this research is the most important thing we can do.

McClellan: You can't make some people see it, but you got to—

President Johnson: John, 75 percent of the things that we will be making [*a television plays in the background*] 25 years from now—

McClellan: Yeah.

President Johnson: —we have never heard of now. That's how fast this world changes. And in the year 2000, we're going to have 80 percent of our people, over 300 million, living in the cities of the country, and this damn world shifting and changing so fast.

End of excerpt.

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Full information about this conversation: ["We Got a Fair Chance to Keep Up"](#)