



“Get the Immigration Bill Reported”

Date: 1965-08-26

Conversation: WH6508-11-8639

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Nicholas deB. Katzenbach

Participant: Emanuel Celler

Start Time: 14:50

Duration: 03:06

Place: Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson beseeched Attorney General Nicholas deB. “Nick” Katzenbach for help in reporting the immigration bill. At the time of the call, Johnson was meeting with the House sponsor of the bill, Rep. Emanuel “Manny” Celler [D–New York], who warned Katzenbach that a Senate subcommittee had sought to limit immigration from the Western Hemisphere, a provision that Celler deemed “very dangerous.”

President Johnson: And then if you’ll get that damned immigration bill past the Senate, if you’ll ever get [Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy [D–Massachusetts] to get—catch up with Old Man [Emanuel “Manny”] Celler [D–New York]. Here he is 70 years old, and he’s already got his bill passed. [*Unclear comment by Celler in the background.*] Then we’ll get—we’ll hijack some of these fellows up there in Brooklyn [New York], and we’ll take the pens that we sign the bill with, and we’ll go up there and present them to—we’ll get John [W.] McCormack [D–Massachusetts] [to] come down from Boston [Massachusetts], we’ll get you to come up from here, and we’ll bring [J.] Edgar Hoover to scare everybody, and then we’ll go up there to Ellis Island [New York] with Old Manny [Celler] and get our picture in the paper with him and salute him and click our heels. Does that suit you?

Nicholas deB. “Nick” Katzenbach: Suits me fine.

President Johnson: Will you agree to go along with it?

Katzenbach: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: Are you a Celler man?

Katzenbach: Yes, I am.

President Johnson: All right, OK. That ends it. I’ll just get him on.

End of excerpt 1.

President Johnson: Now, here's Manny [who] wants to talk to you. Your heart—your blood pressure all right now? You feeling good?

Katzenbach: Yeah. Yeah, I'm all right. [*Slight chuckle.*]

President Johnson: What are you going to do for me on my birthday? Get the immigration bill reported?

Katzenbach: We got—I think we're over the biggest hurdle now, sir.

President Johnson: You get the vote on it?

Katzenbach: In the subcommittee, yeah.

President Johnson: Well, I thought it's the full committee.

Katzenbach: Subcommittee, no.

President Johnson: Well, this is just the subcommittee.

Katzenbach: No, but they promised—[James O. "Jim"] Eastland's [D–Mississippi] promised in the full. Said there's no problem there.

President Johnson: Is that tomorrow?

Katzenbach: That's what I'm trying to set up. Either—I was trying to get late today, when I had to leave there. I'm going to go back on it, but I'm trying to see whether they just couldn't meet late today [*unclear*]. I didn't see any reason why they couldn't, and I have [Samuel J. "Sam"] Ervin [D–North Carolina] and [Everett M.] Dirksen [R–Illinois] wanting that, so I think Jim might do it. Won't take ten minutes.

President Johnson: I'd sure tell him it'd be awfully good to. [*Katzenbach attempts to interject.*] Are you going to—tell him you're going to get his judge in Mississippi for him. Tell him they're all raising hell, but that me and you and Cellers [*sic*] are going to get it for him. [*speaking aside to Celler*] Manny, can I commit you? Don't you think the chairman of the committee, in Senate committee, oughtn't to have his judge cut out? Nick's going get him to report the immigration bill.

Emanuel "Manny" Celler: [*speaking in the background*] Yes, I agree, but that goes for the chairman of the House committee, too. [*Laughter. Celler takes the receiver.*] Hello, Nick?

Katzenbach: Yes, sir.

Celler: You know, the subcommittee of [the] immigration committee, voted out that [*Katzenbach acknowledges*] immigration bill with a ceiling on the Western Hemisphere.

Katzenbach: I know they did.

Celler: That's very dangerous. Now, I don't know what the full committee will do or what the Senate will do, but if perchance they put the ceiling on, I'm going to raise hell.

Now, that points up the need to get proper conferees, 'cause I want to support the House provision.

Katzenbach: Mm-hmm.

Celler: Now, that—if I go down the line in the regular way and appoint the regular conferees, we're lost, 'cause that means they'll vote undoubtedly [*clears throat*] to put the ceiling on Western Hemisphere.

Now, I'll need your help, then, a damn lot of help to be able to be a little unorthodox in the appointment of these conferees.

Katzenbach: All right.

Celler: Do you follow me?

Katzenbach: Yeah, I follow you.

Celler: And we'll have to work with John McCormack on it, because I can't take any chances on some of these bastards will just kick over the traces on me.

Katzenbach: Yeah.

Celler: That's very important. Keep that in mind, will you, Nick, please?

Katzenbach: Sure will.

Celler: Wait a minute. Mr. President wants to talk to you.

President Johnson: I'll talk to him about that, Nick.

Katzenbach: All right.

President Johnson: OK.

Katzenbach: All right, bye.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: Conversation WH6508-11-8639, 26 August 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

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