



“It’s for the Economy”

Date: 1967-02-07
Conversation: WH6702-02-11519-11520
Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson
Participant: Gerald R. Ford Jr.
Start Time: 16:00
Duration: 03:03
Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson and House Minority Leader (and future president) Gerald R. “Jerry” Ford Jr. [R–Michigan] discussed highway funding. Johnson noted that it was “a governmental policy that I don’t think is partisan,” even though it had been criticized by a Republican House member. The President then asked that Ford reach out to him more often, as other Republican leaders did.

President Johnson: I think what you can say to [William C. “Bill”] Cramer [R–Florida] is: “The President’s asked me and [Everett M.] Dirksen [R–Illinois] about withholding another 400 million [dollars]. He can withhold it, and you can’t do a damn thing about it, and you can pass a resolution through this House telling him not to, and he’ll veto the living hell out of it. And we’re a hell of a poor people to be talking about withholding expenditures, and then when he withholds some, we make him cancel them. Now, I’ll get him not to take this other action, and I’ll get it released for you as soon as the year’s over, at a reasonable time, maybe August, September, somewhere along there where we can use it. But let’s don’t get this thing in partisan politics. If you—”

Gerald R. “Jerry” Ford Jr.: Let me ask if I understand.

President Johnson: Yeah?

Ford: You’ve earmarked, or set aside, 400 million [dollars]?

President Johnson: Right. That’s right.

Ford: And—

President Johnson: We withheld that, at the [LBJ] Ranch.

Ford: Right. And you have [*President Johnson attempts to interject*] contemplated, or discussed, the possibility of another 400 [million dollars]?

President Johnson: Right. That’s right. And I’ve told them and announced publicly that we’re considering it, but we have not done it.

Ford: So that they're—

President Johnson: That's what really stirred up the opposition, when they heard the second withholding.

Ford: Now, do I understand that, even though you've discussed it, and so forth, you *are* going to let that go out? Or . . . ?

President Johnson: I would just forget it and cancel it and let it go on out, if I could buy them off. [Laughs.]

Ford: But you would stand firm on the 400 [million dollars] that—

President Johnson: That's—

Ford: —we all discussed?

President Johnson: That's right. Until—till we decided that we could release it, and I'll be glad to talk to you about it whenever you're—you get to hurting. Whenever we need some jobs. Whenever we need to release it. I'm not—all I want to do, it's for the economy, period.

Ford: Well, let me talk to Bill Cramer on that—

President Johnson: That's right. And talk to Ev Dirksen, and let's get this hearing over in the Senate stopped. And what I will do, I'll take no action on impounding the other 400 [million dollars]. If they challenge me and want them run in the ground, I can damned easily do it, and I don't believe you can whip me between now and June 30th. [Ford chuckles.] I don't want to, but I just want to help the economy, and I honestly think—I honestly think that we ought to hold it a little while longer, but we ought to release some of the housing. Then road ought to come right after it. I think you kind of ought to do it by priorities. I think the soldiers are entitled to theirs, and I released 600 million [dollars], because we've held it 18 months. Now, I'm going to release some of the housing sometime in the spring. Then, I'm willing to go along with the roads.

Ford: Can I talk to you about another matter [*unclear*]?—

President Johnson: Yes, sir. Anything you want to. Anytime. Matter of fact, I resent a little bit you don't call me up.

Ford: Well—

President Johnson: You beat [Charles A.] Charlie Halleck [R–Indiana]. He used to call me. Dirksen calls me every week about something. I think we ought to get along better. I'm not—I don't mind you having all the men if—I expect if I got in a *real* emergency, I'd get more votes in your place than I do some other places anyways. [Ford laughs.] Go ahead. What you got on your mind?

Ford: You got a lot in '64. [Both laugh.]

President Johnson: I mean, in your—if the country was involved and the flag was going down, I imagine I could holler "Fire!" on the Republican side [Ford chuckles] and get more help than I could sometimes out of [Benjamin S.] Rosenthal [D–New York] and—

Ford: I know damn [*unclear*]

President Johnson: —some of my own boys. Go ahead, now. What do you got on your mind?

Ford: All right.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: Conversation WH6702-02-11519-11520, 7 February 1967, 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: ["It's for the Economy"](#)