



## “It’s a Horrible, Tragic Thing”

**Date:** 1968-06-05  
**Conversation:** WH6806-01-13104-13106  
**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson  
**Participant:** Edward M. Kennedy  
**Start Time:** 06:35  
**Duration:** 01:41  
**Place:** Mansion

SCENE SETTER: Roughly six hours after Sen. Robert F. “Bobby” Kennedy [D–New York] was shot in Los Angeles after winning the California Democratic primary, President Johnson placed a call to Sen. Edward M. “Teddy” Kennedy [D–Massachusetts], RFK’s younger brother, to express his sympathy. Johnson also explained a new provision he had authorized for Secret Service details to be assigned to all presidential candidates and their families.

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**President Johnson:** Ted?

**Edward M. “Teddy” Kennedy:** Yes. Oh, Mr. President, well, you’re very good to call.

**President Johnson:** Well, we—we’re terribly grieved, Ted. I don’t know what we can do, but anything we can, we want to.

**Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*]

**President Johnson:** And it’s a horrible, tragic thing. I—we have put a detail around the families, and we don’t have authority, but we’re going to ask the Congress to give us that authority. In the meantime, we’re assuming it. We don’t want them to think we’re snooping, though, and the MPs [military police] around are for their—any purpose except to protect them. But I wanted—I placed a call for all of you, and if they haven’t, I told them to get Pierre [E. G.] Salinger or get you or get [Stephen E.] Steve Smith or to get [Theodore C.] Ted [Sorensen], and they got him. And if you’ll explain to them here what we are doing, so they won’t—a Secret Service man will be in charge. Under the present law, they can just cover [*Kennedy acknowledges*] Mrs. [Jacqueline B. “Jackie”] Kennedy, ex-presidents, and the President. We’re extending that to all candidates for the presidency and their families. And the Secret Service will take charge, and they’ll use [Departments of] Defense and Justice people until we get authority, and we’re going to try to get it today.

**Kennedy:** Well, that’s good. Well, I appreciate it [*clears throat*] very much. [*Unclear.*]

**President Johnson:** Well, it’s a horrible, terrible thing, and we grieve with you, and I wish there’s something we could do. And I don’t want to bother you, but when you’re talking to your mother

[Rose Kennedy], please tell her that our thoughts are with her, and our prayers are with you, too, Ted.

**Kennedy:** Right, sir. Mr. President, thank you very much.

**President Johnson:** Thank you, Ted.

*End of excerpt.*

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CITATION: “Lyndon B. Johnson, Edward M. ‘Teddy’ Kennedy, Stephen E. Smith, and Theodore C. ‘Ted’ Sorensen on 5 June 1968,” Conversation WH6806-01-13104-13106, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Johnson Telephone Tapes: 1968, ed. Kent B. Germany, Nicole Hemmer, and Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4011103>

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: [“It’s a Horrible, Tragic Thing”](#)