

FOREWORD

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Punctuation:

The following conventions are used throughout the transcripts:

- * * * To indicate a pause in the recording while the speaker listens to the person speaking at the other end of the telephone. Used when only one side of a telephone conversation is recorded.
- [?] When the transcriber is not certain of what is said on the recording.
- To indicate a sentence which the speaker trails off without completing it.
- . . . When a speaker is interrupted before a sentence is completed.
- _____ To indicate the speaker's emphasis.
- [/] Used to enclose editorial comments of the transcriber such as /Meeting appears to be breaking up/ or /Several speakers speak at once and none of the words are intelligible./

Names:

The first time a name is mentioned, the full name is provided whenever it is known. "JFK" and "RFK" are used for President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, respectively. When the identity of a speaker is unknown, "Speaker?" is used; when the identification of a speaker is uncertain, a question mark follows the name. The heading of each transcript gives the names of all participants listed in the President's Appointment Books as scheduled to attend the meeting.

Preparation:

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the audiovisual research room in the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made.

Papers of John F. Kennedy

Presidential Recordings

Dictabelts

Dictabelt 20A

Conversation #3: President Kennedy and Russell Long

May 27, 1963, 4:30 p.m.

President: Senator Russell Long, please.

Operator: Alright, sir, thank you.

President: Hello.

Sen. Long: Hello, Mr. President.

President: I hear that you did a helluva job up there.

Sen. Long: We got your debt limit bill unscrambled, [laughter]

President: My God, you just saved the government about 200 million dollars.

Sen. Long: Well, I don't know if we accomplished anything. But anyway, we got, uh . . . You know, I thought old [Senator Harrison] Williams was trying to help you until he offered that damned amendment that screwed this thing up.

President: I know it, but by the time they got through, uh . . .

Sen. Long: The Secretary Treasury [C. Douglas Dillon] is going to come hack and tell me what he thought. I thought I knew what he wanted in the beginning, but he was going to come back and tell me, and he is on the way down the hall to talk to those Republicans to see about getting some help. I thought old Williams had decided to help the man. Instead, he was trying to screw you up.

President: I know, but listen, I hear you did a helluva job up there, Russell. That is terrific.

Sen. Long: Thanks so much, Mr. President.

President: How are you doing? I hear that we are in some trouble in Louisiana.

Sen. Long: Well, sir, I haven't had a chance to check today. I was down in . . . I went to Houston, Texas to kind of see if I could squeeze a little money out of the oil people to get us along. And I talked to the Governor of Louisiana from over there and he said that he thought he might be better to keep that bill in the House Appropriations Committee.

President: The thing is . . . what's so screwy about that thing is, that if a Democrat carries Louisiana, no matter who those delegates are, they can't go up and make a deal with a Republican then. Let's say, uh, because a Republican can't look like he is in the position of out-bidding a Democrat on some civil rights question. So, therefore, the best they can do is throw it in the House of Representatives. And then everybody sort of gets on the hot seat because you either break up the Democratic party or everybody votes Democratic. So where does it end? I know it's sort of just means of protest, isn't it?

Sen. Long: Well, no, what they have got in mind . . . they are trying to work out a sort of block vote type deal where they would get their votes together and then say, alright now, if a guy's got . . . if our vote might elect somebody President, then he is going to have to come to our terms. Now, you know those fellow made some kind of deal like that in that [Samuel J.] Tilden-[Rutherford B.] Hayes race, I believe it was.

President: Yea, that is right. But this isn't 187...6. It isn't 1876.

Sen. Long: I think that it is a lousy idea.

President: Because what happens is, uh, I mean it would become the most publicized thing. And then they come up and say, you got to do something. You know in the first place you've got the courts operating anyway, no matter what the President did. And then they come up and then everybody is looking and saying, what is the President promising this group? Pretty soon, you got the goddamnest mayhem and it finally ends up in the House of Representatives. I doesn't get them much, and in addition, everybody then says, "Christ, the South is so uncertain that I had just better try to get my votes in the North."

Sen Long: That is right, but of course the worse thing about that, uh, I don't know if you have thought about the bill, I haven't studied it, but have been told about it. You see, the worst thing about that is that in effect, that would take the South out of the Presidential election.

President: That's right. Exactly. Exactly. Until afterwards.

Sen. Long: So that if we were not going to vote on whether you were going to be President or not, why should you promise us anything? You should direct your appeal to those, uh, where the Negro vote might be the key vote.

President: At least I could count on it, otherwise I would have to figure, well, I have to do my business after November, and I can't do it under those conditions. I think it's crazy for the South. Because this way, I am concerned about Georgia and Louisiana and these places where we got a chance to carry. But if I end up with no chance to carry them, then I got to go up North and try to do my business.

Sen. Long: Right. Now I tell you, I did some talking with [Representative] Gillis [W. Lang] and both of us agreed that we ought to be against this thing. But here is the conclusion that we heard about also. Whether we win or lose on this fight, this bunch of White Citizens Council and Ku Klux down there can renew the battle after the next gubernatorial race. And so can we. In other words, if we win the governor's race, uh . . .

President: But of course, it is harder to repeal . . . it's harder to repeal. This way the Governor is always sitting there. It is much harder to repeal once it is, uh . . .

Sen. Long: I agree.

President: . . . but, anyway, they will renew it afterwards, uh . . .

Sen. Long: I think that we have got a chance. I haven't, uh, you heard what happened down in the House of Representative today, I haven't heard.

President: No.

Sen. Long: Well, I am down on the floor here, but I will undertake to find out what happened down there, and this thing is very similar to the stand I made in that 1952 convention when my delegation wanted to walk out. What I said was that I am not going to even, uh . . .

President: I remember. I remember. I was there.

Sen. Long: I am not going to promise I am going to vote for the man you nominated, but I will stake my political existence on the right of my people to vote for him, if that is what they want to do.

President: That's right. That's right. That's the best line, isn't it? That's pretty good.

Sen. Long: You see. And frankly, what, uh, now, Gillis and I have talked about it, and frankly, I thought, since he was running for Governor; this is just confidential, please don't go and tell . . . because . . . ran out on me at Chicago at that time; he didn't know I was thinking this; but what I figured was, hell, why not go ahead and stand up on the issue and take this attitude with them that you boys are trying to call off the President's race. And let me tell you something, in this great democracy, if you want to call off that President's race, you had better try to call your race off, because you are going to be the guy that needs it, time you tell people that they can't vote.

President: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sen. Long: Which I think essentially what that thing would be. I will find out how it is going down there. As I said, the Governor thought that it he could tie it up in that Appropriations Committee and kill it there. It seems to me that ways under those rules of legislature where they could maneuver to offer it on the floor, even if the committee wouldn't report it out. But I will try to check it and find out just where we stand. At the moment, old Jimmy Davis is trying to help us with that thing. I don't know who called him, but somebody did.

President: Larry O'Brien called him this morning.

Sen. Long: Right, well, Larry might know the latest on it.

President: Ok, I will get a hold of Larry.

Sen. Long: Fine, sir.

President: Well, that was good today, and anything you can do on this thing, because, God, Louisiana, we'd like to get a chance at it, anyway.

Sen. Long: I'm not too . . . frankly, Mr. President, I am not too much worried about how this thing works out in Louisiana for now. Because as far as Louisiana is concerned, I think that our chance of winning the Governor's election is good, and if we win the Governor's election, it is completely in our power to make it how we blessed well please.

President: It would have an effect on Florida, of course.

Sen. Long: Well, I am a little concerned about it sort of starting a movement, you know.

President: That's right. Because Florida is hanging on the edge, anyway.

Sen. Long: Yea, right. Well, I will try to help and both now and if the damn fool thing carries, I will try to help get it repealed later on. But for right now, I think that it would be good for us to see if we can't beat it. I think that somebody got to stand up on the issue. But as far as I am concerned, I am against it and not afraid to say so.