

Interview on NDC Program "LBJ Report No. 1" Ray Scherer, Senator Dirksen,
Senator Humphrey November 25, 1963

Mr. Scherer What happened Friday was so very unlikely that this capital city has been living in a cloudy mist of unreality. With the rush of events no one had time to ponder whether what had happened was real or whether it was kind of a nightmare. But tonight there is a new grave in Arlington. The President who was, is dead, and we have a new leader. We are back to reality. In the United States Senate the realities are that one-hundred men have yet to face up to a civil rights bill, a tax bill, a foreign-aid bill, a long list. With the advent of the new national leader, Lyndon B. Johnson, will this advent make a difference in the way the Senate operates. To explore this question we are about to talk with two Senators who know him. Senate Republican Leader, Everett Dirksen -- he sat in the seat across the aisle when Lyndon Johnson was Senate Leader -- and Hubert Humphrey, the Majority Whip. He was a Johnson deputy when Senator Johnson was proving himself as the most accomplished Majority Leader in the Senate in many a year. Gentlemen, tomorrow we go back to work. National tragedy, such a grievous thing as we have just been through, generally has in its weight a kind of moratorium on partisanship. Can we expect such a thing now, Senator Dirksen?

Senator Dirksen Well, not entirely, if you think that any political party is going to be divested entirely of partisanship. Because that is going to be determined by the fundamental differences between the parties. But so far as generalities is concerned, I think we can work very well with President Johnson and why shouldn't we? We have been friends over a long period of time and I served as Minority Leader when he was Majority Leader and we always managed somehow to compose our differences and at the same time make the points, so

far as our party responsibility was concerned. So I anticipate that his relationship with both the Senate and the House ought to be rather singularly pellucid.

Senator Humphrey Well, I surely would agree with the statement of Senator Dirksen. Partisanship within itself is no evil trait in American life. In fact partisanship is the yeast (?) of congressional government and of government in the United States. It provides sort of a ferment out of which we get the results of legislative process and executive action. President Johnson does have an unusually good understanding and knowledge of the processes of Congress. He has many good friends. Two of them are here with you tonight. I can say very frankly that one of the desirable developments in reference to this situation is the fact that a man like Senator Dirksen or like myself can talk very frankly and we do talk very frankly to those in the executive branch of the government and we will talk that way to President Johnson. I think this will be all to the good for the country. So the future looks to me as a hopeful one.

Mr. Scherer Lyndon Johnson worked a kind of magic on the Senate when he was in it. How much magic can be exerted on the Senate when the President is on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue?

Senator Dirksen Well, it will ^{not} be the quality of magic, I am sure. He must necessarily present his case. But I doubt very much whether there will be a great transformation in the Senate. They are independent thinkers on nearly every challenge that's on the horizon today and so he must anticipate, of course. But in that respect there is no great change in the Senate or in its outlook. Now if you have to translate that in terms of specifics let's take civil rights, let's take the tax bill. I doubt very much whether there is going to be a great

upheaval of sentiment because generally speaking most of the Senators know how they feel about these proposals that either are before us or will be before us before too long.

Senator Humphrey Can I say a word about the magic, Roy?

Mr. Scherer Yes, please do.

Senator Humphrey You see, when Lyndon Johnson was Majority Leader he was a part of the whole senatorial process, the congressional process. He was with us on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour intimate basis and he was one of us and we were the one with him. Now he is the Chief Executive of this country. He exercises the powers of the presidency. Under our constitutional system of separation of powers, those powers are separate and they are very distinct and distinctive. He has unique functions and separate functions. I believe that President Johnson will have a good relationship with Congress primarily because he has a good personal relationship with the members of Congress and particularly those that are entrusted with the responsibility of leadership. But I am not speaking merely of the elected leaders of the respective parties. I am speaking of committee chairmen and ranking minority members. This is very, very important. But the President must by the nature of his office and the constitutional system be separate from the Congress. Now he'll have his connections through Senator Dirksen, through Senator Mansfield, through Speaker McCormack . . .

Senator Dirksen Through Senator Humphrey.

Senator Humphrey . . . well, we hope so, and I surely will give him all the co-operation I can, but I think we ought to make it quite clear that he'll have good working relationships. But we have our work cut out for us.

Mr. Scherer What you are saying is there's a difference between being Majority Leader and President as far as the relationship is concerned.

Senator Dirksen Oh, very definitely so.

Mr. Scherer Aren't we seeing a kind of a national rallying around the new President? Is it naive to think that this will help resolve differences over such a thing as civil rights?

Senator Dirksen Well, the disposition of course will be to be quite cooperative with the new President on the theory that a transition is always fraught with a little danger. Not nearly so much as in another country, because it's always amazing how an event like this can happen and a transition is so easily undertaken. But at the same time the President will have his views and the Congress its views, and those views will be freely expressed. Now if they come into conflict, of course there will be a few sparks that will fly and that only means of course the vitality of our constitutional system.

Senator Humphrey I think we ought to point out that a little disagreement or discussion or give and take on a political issue doesn't necessarily mean that you are poles apart. It means that there may be refinement of detail and it does take some time. The people that are in a hurry about all of these matters really do not ask for a democratic system. They're asking for something else because we do have one-hundred Senators with one-hundred points of view. In a sense they are individualists and we have 435 members of the House of Representatives. These men are individuals. But let me say this, lest we have any misunderstanding, that the relationships our late and beloved President Kennedy had in the Congress were good relationships. They were warm and they were friendly and they were constructive, and I believe what Senator Dirksen and I, what we are really trying to say here, is that there isn't a major difference after all. It would be really a reflection upon President Kennedy if we were to even say so and I don't believe there is any difference. President Kennedy had the co-operation of the **leaders** of Congress.

He had the respect of the members of Congress and President Johnson is going to have the same kind of good solid co-operation, but Ray, we deal with hard issues. The tax bill is. This isn't easy. We are talking about a fundamental fiscal policy of this government. Civil rights legislation, this is a basic fundamental constitutional policy that we are establishing. You don't do these things quickly and you don't do it by just felicitation and good will.

Mr. Scherer Thank you very much. Do you have another point to make, sir?

Senator Dirksen Well, do we have time?

Mr. Scherer I think we are just about out of time.

Senator Dirksen Well, I was just going to say I am glad Hubert brought up this idea of haste. It reminds me of the man who broke into Phillip Brooks study and saw him pacing up and down and said, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "I'm in a hurry, but God Isn't." Now we take our own time because only by hewing out on the anvil of discussion do you get solid and durable results.

Senator Humphrey And we expect this good friend over here to help us hammer out a good product, which he will.

Mr. Scherer Thank you both so much for coming after four such difficult days. And now it's time to hear from the House.

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