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"WASHINGTON CONVERSATION"

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GUEST: THE HONORABLE EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN
(Senate Minority Leader)

HOST: Paul Niven

PRODUCER: Michael J. Marlow

ANNOUNCER: Join us for a Washington Conversation with Senate Minority Leader Everett McKinley Dirksen.

During the course of the next half hour, the CBS Television Network hopes to sketch in some of the details of this man, a different approach to the private mind and public philosophy of Republican Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen, the character and philosophy of the lawyer from Pekin, Illinois, who has been in the public service for most of his 65 years.

Your host for this informal unrehearsed Washington Conversation in our studio conference room is CBS News Correspondent Paul Niven.

MR. NIVEN: Good afternoon, Senator.

I seem to remember your saying in the course of a debate on the floor last year that you really never wanted to leave the House and go to the Senate, but your wife and daughter talked you into it.

Was that true, sir?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, Paul, that's quite a story. Actually, I left the House because of eye difficulties, and at one time they thought I had malignant coreoretinitis(?) and actually had me in Johns Hopkins to remove an eye.

So I quit. And then, of course, the push began,

because we took a terrible trouncing in Illinois in 1948, and as the pressures became greater I had to make a decision. I said I wouldn't make it alone, and so one evening at home in my study, my wife and daughter and I made the decision. And I have often remarked that it was two to one that I become a candidate for the Senate, so I said, "Well, I shall not run, we shall run," and "we" did, and they squirmed me all over the state, took dictation I suppose at nearly every crossroads in the state, and that's how that happened.

MR. NIVEN: Speaker Rayburn told us last week that he has never wanted to leave the House and go to the Senate. Have you ever regretted that you did leave the House?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, no. The Senate is a different body, in a sense, and I hope the House members are not going to hold me to this, but it is a little more deliberative. You see, in the House you always operated under a five-minute rule, and you couldn't quite expand yourself --

MR. NIVEN: You sometimes require more than that, don't you?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, there are people who are a little expansive and I suppose I would be less than candid if I didn't impersonally own up to the fact that I'm one of them.

MR. NIVEN: Senator, speaking of oratory, would you say that the number of distinguished orators in the Senate

has declined over the years? You really are about the only outstanding one left, aren't you?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I sort of disclaim the term. I'd rather say it's conversation at a high level. But it has become something of an impaired art. I think much of it is due to the fact that we as a people generally have become a little careless and a little slovenly about our speech. You must have known it in conversation. Look how we elide words and phrases, and if you want to find out the difficulty that that causes, just ask somebody who is studying English, and you'll just have them all over the lot wondering what you said when you rapidly and carelessly elide over words and phrases, and it gives them difficulty.

And so, it does, to a certain extent, impair at the same time our appreciation of careful and precise speech.

MR. NIVEN: Of course, you brought to public life not only stage experience but experience as a playwright, a novelist, and a short story writer.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I ought to qualify that a little, I think. I used to do a good deal of amateur theatricals. I think it's one of those urges you get, and I like to do it, and I must confess to a bit of wickedness, in a sense, that I always wanted to go on the stage. My saintly mother discouraged the idea. She thought the stage was a wicked place. And so, trying to be a dutiful

son, I did not go on the stage.

But I did fill in the time writing some plays and novels -- short stories --

MR. NIVEN: Five novels and a hundred short stories.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, yes, I don't know what the turn-out was, but it wasn't so well received, I must say.

I finally got one two-act play published, and I was astonished beyond words recently, walking aimlessly through Marshall Field's book store in Chicago, there it was, and I think they still sell it to high schools for class play purposes.

MR. NIVEN: Is it selling on its merits or on your name as a Senator?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: My name as a Senator is not attached, just my name, in collaboration with an old high school friend of mine. But I don't know that people ever connected us up.

MR. NIVEN: Speaking of wickedness, Senator Dirksen, a couple of days ago a Republican House member raised the question of a possible conflict of interest in the Post Office Department. He pointed out that Postmaster General Day, who is enforced with keeping -- who is charged with keeping obscenity out of the mails, is held to be the author of an allegedly racy novel.

Could any of your writings be described as racy, sir?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, goodness, no. Mine were so circumspect and so philosophical and psychological, and I never ventured into that taboo field.

MR. NIVEN: If you had achieved a lot of success as a novelist or as a short story writer, would you have still gone into public life?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: It's difficult to say. If you had to follow the technique of Clarence Buddington Kelland, for instance, with whom I used to visit a little out in Phoenix, Arizona, I presume that would be a grind to which you set yourself all day long, and you would scarcely have any time for public service, because, believe me, this is a demanding business.

MR. NIVEN: Do you ever have any nostalgia, do you ever think that that life could have been more satisfying?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, who shall ever have addressed himself to it without suffering some pangs of nostalgia later on, because in an impressionable day when you are much younger, you just feel you are going to be the great American dramatist or the great American playwright, and I thought surely I'd either do that or I'd become the great American actor.

MR. NIVEN: Well, the minority ---

SENATOR DIRKSEN: But time knocks the corners off of those expectations.

MR. NIVEN: But the minority leadership of the United States Senate is also quite an aspiration, isn't it?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Yes, it is. It's a very appealing thing.

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MR. NIVEN: Your father gave you the middle name McKinley, when you were 11 months old. Does that mean he always contemplated a political career for you?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: No, not quite. You see, I was born in 1896, and I am one of twins, my twin brother an identical twin, lives in my home town of Pekin, Illinois. Father gave him the name of Thomas Reed Dirksen. He was named after a great Speaker of the House of Representatives. He gave me the name of Everett McKinley; but there was another son in the family, also living, my older brother, who bears the name of Benjamin Harrison Dirksen. So, we have gone in for rather impressive names. Of course I didn't select it, you know, because I am sure I couldn't even babble the word McKinley at age 11.

MR. NIVEN: You don't have any Andrew Jacksons or Thomas Jeffersons in your family?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: No, they would all, I am sure, have been resolute Republicans.

MR. NIVEN: Couldn't you have some interesting mischief if you brought that identical twin brother to Washington and dispatched him to a few rooms around the Senate?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: He has been here, and I think in all candor and in all kindness, I can say that probably the political instinct doesn't run too deep in him.

MR. NIVEN: He never voted in any rolls calls or conferred with any --

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SENATOR DIRKSEN: No, his tour of service in public life consisted of four years as a Commissioner of the City of Pekin. It's nonpartisan in character but it is public service, notwithstanding. But I don't believe the instinct was as deep in him as it was in me.

MR. NIVEN: Senator, in your 30 years in the Congress your voting record -- 28 years, I believe -- your voting record has been very mixed and even in the early days of the New Deal you voted for some of the Roosevelt program, against other parts of it.

How do you feel now in retrospect about that period?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let me give you one little quote from the greatest statesman that our country ever produced, Abraham Lincoln. You remember he once said, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew, we must first disenthral ourselves and then we shall save the Union."

So you see here was a great man who met changing conditions and circumstances, and when I first came here in 1933 we were in the throes of a real depression. Then obviously the pressures, the circumstances the conditions dictated in considerable degree what you think you should do to meet the problems that arise.

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MR. NIVEN: Sir, in a speech in 1947 you said, "I still contend that in 1932 and '33 we started upon a great departure from the course of freedom. Economic desperation somehow frustrates and blinds people and oftentimes they are willing to throw their liberties overboard to achieve an economic objective."

Do you still feel that we did throw some of our liberties overboard in the New Deal?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I feel that there has been a deep intrusion of Government into the economic life of the country and its people. And, in proportion, as Government makes economic decisions instead of having them made in the marketplace, to that extent you have to a degree impaired some of the freedoms of the people.

MR. NIVEN: Would it be your hope that some of the present Federal intervention in the economy could actually be stopped or undone or that only any further intervention could be halted?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I won't go so far as to say that it should be stopped. I saw a term recently that had appeal to me. It's called "balanced freedom."

There are certain things Government must do, but always you try to keep the major economic segments of the country in balance and there, Government through regulation, not control, and that distinction we must carefully make, can do

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something of a job.

MR. NIVEN: Well, you have said that during the present session that the Republicans would always offer, or try to offer constructive alternatives to President Kennedy's programs.

Is it fair to say that your alternatives will always be more modest in scope and in expense?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I think as a generalization that probably would be true.

Consider for a moment, Medicare.

We generally went along with the so-called Finance Committee proposal which puts this on a matching basis with the States operating the program. One alternative, as you know, was bringing it within the framework of the Social Security tax. I opposed it. I think I would still oppose it. The proposal that did come along was infinitely more modest and, incidentally, it is only within the last few days that the Legislature of the State of Illinois has taken up for consideration a Bill that will comply with the so-called Kerr-Mills Bill. And, in that sense, our proposal is more modest. It would be more modest with respect to Federal aid to education, and with --

MR. NIVEN: I take it you are going to oppose -- you are going to oppose President Kennedy's medical care plan even as it is now revised?

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SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, if they are going to include it within the Social Security frame, unless there are other modifications, the chances are I would; but now this gives an opportunity to make something clear.

You see, Congress operates under the amendatory process. Look at the feed grains Bill. It has been significantly changed by the Senate Committee and in some degree by the House Committee, so that when a Bill finally goes across the floor or rather comes up for final enactment, it may be an altogether different Bill. And so when people crowd you a little and they want a statement, yes or no, on a Bill -- actually you can't tell what its final form is going to be and precisely how you are going to vote.

MR. NIVEN: Well, do you have the votes to stop a medical care plan under Social Security from going through in the Senate?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, that I do not know. It depends on how many Senators sitting on the other side of the aisle look through the same pair of glasses that we do. There are many of course who share our convictions in this field, and in other fields, but you have got to have a majority of the vote in the Senate.

MR. NIVEN: Senator, do you actually try to influence your Republican Senators on roll calls? Do you try to persuade them to vote in keeping with your views, or the

dm 6 President's programs, if it's a Republican President?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let me first say I do not carry it to an offensive degree.

There are times when a roll is close, and when the issue involved is not so sharp but what a Member could very well vote one way or another.

I do not get conscience stricken then if I ask whether it would be possible for him to change his vote. But I try to be quite circumspect about it and never offensive.

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01 MR. NIVEN: There have been colorful descriptions written of Senator Johnson, when he was a Senator, ambling around the Chamber, leaning on people's shoulders and drawing on political blackjacks, recalling obligations and favors, and being very persuasive.

Do you think he did that, and did you use the same technique?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I must not comment on his technique, but with respect to my own, I try to be courteous and pleasant about it, because, after all, if it is a matter of conviction with a Senator - -

Then, you have no right, I think, to press him, even for your partisan advantage that may be involved. And if I were to do it, I am pretty sure that they might tell me off.

MR. NIVEN: You mean you wouldn't remind a Senator of a favor you did him in his home district two years ago, if you needed his support in a tight roll call?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Paul, that is the last thing that I would do, because I'm afraid that might be taking advantage.

MR. NIVEN: You mean it's the last thing you would do in order of the things you would do, or that you wouldn't do it?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I just wouldn't do it.

MR. NIVEN: Wouldn't do it.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I wouldn't trade on the fact that

o2 perhaps at some time I had gone into a Senator's state to make a meeting in his behalf, or had campaigned for him; because that would be a pretty selfish ground on which to place it.

MR. NIVEN: It's fair to say, is it not, that you and Senator Johnson have worked in great harmony throughout your joint tenures?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: With the greatest of harmony, and out of a recognition, I think, that the Senate is a two-way street, and if the leaders do not get along, then very easily, through dilatory motions and otherwise, it could be rendered into a shambles and you wouldn't get anything done.

I could take a half a dozen or a dozen people on our side, if we set ourselves to it, and conduct a filibuster and just withhold action on legislation week after week, but every Senator is a patriot, he is devoted to the well-being of his country, and in consequence the Senate program has to move along. You can't afford to have it stalemated at some place. And so the leaders have got to understand each other, and Lyndon Johnson and I always understood each other, even though we did disagree sharply on many things, but in the best of grace.

MR. NIVEN: It sometimes looked from the gallery as if he was trying to occasionally canvass members of your party. Did you ever -- were you ever annoyed to see him canvassing

your troops?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I have noticed him on our side, but in all fairness I should say perhaps I've been over on his side, too.

MR. NIVEN: Some Republican Senators, I believe, wear LBJ cuff links.

(Laughter.)

MR. NIVEN: Senator, turning to foreign policy, it has sometimes been written that you have switched back and forth, that you have supported the Marshall Plan, even said it wasn't big enough; then three or four years later described it as "Operation Rathole."

One suggestion has been that you changed your mind when you were running for the Senate, you became isolationist in order to get the political support of the Chicago Tribune.

Is there any justification to that?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: There is none whatsoever, and I'm glad you asked, because it gives me a chance to put this in proper perspective.

I was violently against a good many things in the Marshall Plan in the early days, and the reason for it was that the accent was on relief, as a relief program, because of the problems and the difficulties in Europe. However, abuses crept in, such as sending tons of bubble gum to Belgium with American money, and sending beer coolers

to Italy.

I felt pretty sure that that would be no justification for taxing the American people. And as a result, I set myself resolutely against it. But, don't forget there has been an amazing transformation in the original Marshall Plan. It became ECA, it became ICA, emphasis was placed upon the military aspect as a part of our defense and security set-up, we began to gravitate from gratuities and grants to a loan basis for the economic aspects of the program. So, you see, I think my first position was absolutely correct. And as it began to change and to transform into something really worth while that was helpful to people, I could find it rather easy to support it.

MR. NIVEN: Well, now, as Minority Leader during the Eisenhower years, you supported foreign aid, championed his proposals.

Did you feel that the abuses had been eliminated?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Not entirely. I doubt whether you can ever entirely eliminate abuses in a program that is world-wide, and where you deal with such a diversity of people --- by the very law of human averages and the frailty of the human casting, you are going to get these abuses whether or no. Your hope always is that you can write restrictions and safeguards into legislation to hold them to a minimum, but they will still be there. But the program has become an

infinitely better program.

MR. NIVEN: Senator, a recent Gallup poll after President Kennedy's first month in office asked the people whether they approved or disapproved of the way he was handling his job. 72 per cent said yes, a figure slightly higher than in President Eisenhower's first term.

How would you have voted, sir, if the Gallup poll had asked you?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I haven't the slightest idea how I would have voted. I think from the standpoint of diligence and devotion and timing, he has done a very good job.

You see, my attitude would have to be expressed mainly, I think, from the content of the things that are messaged to the Congress, and on which we a National Legislature, are expected to take action.

MR. NIVEN: I assume you were not a total admirer of the Democratic platform last year, sir.

Do you see any refinements in President Kennedy's actual program?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, it's a fair question, and I think thus far there has been a greater adherence to the middle of the road than I anticipated when I first went through that platform, and I went through it very carefully the moment it was put in print and I had a chance to sit

down with it and leisurely analyze it.

MR. NIVEN: Do you think his major programs that he has outlined so far have a pretty good chance in the Congress, or is it again too early to say?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, first of all, of course I'm not unmindful that there are 65 frontiersmen sitting on the other side of the aisle.

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MR. NIVEN: Some of them occasionally vote with you, do they not?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, perhaps so.

But we have 35, and of course if they set themselves to it, the disparity in the Senate membership is a very substantial one, and I presume you can do pretty well in getting 51 votes out of that whole setup.

MR. NIVEN: Senator, Mr. James Reston, Washington correspondent of the New York Times, has been out in your State and this morning he writes from the date line of DeKalb which he says is in the most Republican county in Illinois, says the President is very popular out there and that people watching you and Congressman Halleck on television consider you obstructive.

How would you answer that?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I would simply say that there is no warrant for that attitude. We have manifested over and over and over again that the opposition party must not follow an obstructionist or a hostile line. Our business is to think in terms of the well-being of the country. Now, maybe our notions about legislation differ, and we would do it differently and in consequence, you can set that down as obstruction, that is simply from the position you have and the standpoint from which you see this, that you see through a different set of eyes.

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MR. NIVEN: Sir, is the attitude of the Republican Party going to be largely determined by Mr. Halleck and yourself and your colleagues or will Vice President Nixon have a voice?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, first of all we do not arrogate to ourselves power to speak for the Party. It must not be forgotten that both House and Senate Republicans have a policy committee; and after the policy committee looks at some of these measures and determines what ought to be done, they then sit down with a larger increment of their membership and I do that every week, or when we have our usual leadership meetings on Thursday, we also have a policy meeting and every Senate Republican attends if he is in town and if he can. And there the whole matter is submitted and we have a roundtable discussion so that everybody is pretty well advised as to the equities in a given measure.

MR. NIVEN: What about the Vice President, he has made it clear that after a period in his law business he is going to take on speeches and articles and make his voice heard. Will you Republicans in Congress be responsive to his views?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, he is the titular head of the Party, and he did a great job in the 1960 campaign. In fact he has done an exceedingly good job throughout the 14 years that Dick Nixon has been in public life. And manifestly you do not disdain or brush aside your Party leader or the

do I think it is which he can.

Now, I think you will find that when a man has a political career that's of some size and when he has finally settled his course so to speak and comes back in this direction, certainly we shall have him come, I am sure, before the leadership to visit. Why shouldn't we avail ourselves of the benefit of his advice and the things that he has learned in the course of the last campaign?

MR. NIVEN: In the meantime, Senator Goldwater keeps saying that the best hope for the Party is an openly and unashamedly conservative course. Do you agree?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I consider myself a conservative, probably not as conservative as some, not as moderately liberal or liberally moderate as others. You see after all a Party leader has a job. There are viewpoints over here and viewpoints over here, but I think your first responsibility is to develop a degree of unity and cohesion in your party as best you can to make a good militant phalanx, and that I tried to do in the first two years of my leadership, and I am trying to do it again, insofar as I can.

So you have got to find areas of agreement. Now, not all will agree on everything that goes into a package that you can call a Republican program.

MR. NIVEN: You know --

SENATOR DIRKSEN: You are apt to maximize it if you can.

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MR. NIVEN: There are a lot of things, for instance, on which Senator Goldwater and Governor Rockefeller would not agree. If you had to see the Party turn toward one or the other, in which direction would you prefer to see it turn?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, I would not give you an answer on that, I am sure, at the present time; because that would have to unfold and you have got to take these things and resolve them I believe on the basis of merit and what the intrinsic verity of a proposal is.

MR. NIVEN: Well, Senator, what do you think is the Party's best hope for returning to power, both on the Hill and in the White House?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, obviously you keep abreast of the times and the circumstances and I find great comfort and good philosophy in an observation Lincoln once made, and which is unfortunately so often distorted. He said, "The legitimate object of Government is to do for people what needs to be done," that is the clause that is left out, "which they cannot do for themselves at all, or so well in their separate and individual capacities."

"What needs to be done," and it's on that rock that so often diverse personalities in the Party may flounder a little and go in one direction and in another; but the Republican Party was born out of an amalgam of other parties more than a hundred years ago and it remained abreast of the

conditions that stood as a challenge at that time.

MR. NIVEN: But, you feel that the Republican definition

of what needs to be done for people will continue to be

more restrictive than the Democratic definition?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Probably so, because there are those

on the other side who may say everything needs to be done.

Well, I want to preserve the Republic, I want to preserve

the freedom of the people, I want to preserve the national

freedom because individual liberty hangs on it. I want to

do it because bound up in it is our security, our ultimate

success in the cold war and our ultimate leadership of the

free world.

So there are some fundamentals, and when you can get a

party to agree on fundamentals like security and solvency

and freedom and balanced freedom, you have done pretty good.

MR. NIVEN: Senator, I am afraid I must impose upon

you at this point.

Thank you very much for being with us today.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: It is good to be your guest.

MR. NIVEN: Thank you, sir.

This is Paul Niven inviting you to be with us again next

week when our guest will be Interior Secretary Stewart Udall.

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ANNOUNCER: This has been another informal, unhearsed

WASHINGTON CONVERSATION in our studio conference room with a

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prominent national figure, a different approach to a prominent man's private mind and public philosophy. Our guest today was the Minority Leader in the Senate, Everett McKinley Dirksen, Republican of Illinois.

Next week, a new approach to Stewart Udall, a young former Congressman just re-elected for a fourth term before the President appointed him to the Cabinet. You will want to meet this Mormon son of a former Chief Justice of the Arizona State Supreme Court and hear him talk about his life and ideas.

Be with us next week when CBS News correspondent Paul Niven is host for a WASHINGTON CONVERSATION with Stewart Udall, the man whose position as Secretary of the Interior makes him America's number one guardian of our natural resources.

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WASHINGTON CONVERSATION is produced by Michael J. Marlow.

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