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O P E N H E A R I N G

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 1960

Guest:

SENATOR EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN (R. Ill.)

Panel:

CHARLES ASHLEY, ABC Commentator

JOHN EDWARDS, ABC White House Correspondent

JOHN ROLFSON, ABC Washington Correspondent.

Produced by

HELEN JEAN ROGERS

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THE ANNOUNCER: The ABC Television Network presents, from Washington, D. C., OPEN HEARING, a program dedicated to public service.

Now here is your host, ABC commentator Charles Ashley.

MR. ASHLEY: I am sitting in for John Secundari who is out of the country on assignments.

Here in Washington this is a time of decision. The Senate has been in session one week. It has already passed the Antarctica Treaty. It has before it arguments still -- perhaps bogged down -- on minimum wage. Upcoming will be some debate and some action perhaps on medical care for the aged and aging.

These things and other matters before the Senate affect all of us in our pocketbooks and person. So today, to find out just what might happen, we have called for questioning the Senate Minority Leader, Everett McKinley Dirksen, Republican from Illinois.

Ading in the questioning will be John Edwards, our White House correspondent, and John Reifson, ABC Washington correspondent.

Now let's get to work. Senator Dirksen, realistically, what can we expect of this session of Congress?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, first let me take exception to a clause in your opening statement that things are bogged down. They are not bogged down.

MR. ASHLEY: They have been debating on minimum wages for four days now.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I know. But here is a measure that has broad impact on the entire country and particularly on the merchants in the small towns. So it is only fair to assume that there is broad interest in Congress and if you have noted the debates very carefully, there has been more discussion, I think, on the majority side than on our side. So here is a bill of vital importance and it can not be said that it is bogged down. It is getting fair discussion. I haven't even been at bat yet on this bill, and I expect to discuss it at some length, and then to make this bill conform, if we can, to our concept of what it ought to be. Since we are as much interested in a wage-hour amendment as anybody else, we will have amendments to offer, just as we did in the committee, and then we will have to let it take its course.

MR. ASHLEY: Do you think you will get to voting by Tuesday?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, we may get to voting by Tuesday, but it is problematical whether or not you could complete it by Tuesday or even by Wednesday. There is a major substitute that I shall offer. There is a major amendment that Senator Holland of Florida will offer, and I think there are other amendments, probably aggregating

40 or more in number, so by the time we finish all those I would say it might be Wednesday. It could be Thursday, as a matter of fact.

MR. ASHLEY: Well, with this in mind, what major legislation do you expect this bobtailed session of Congress will accomplish before it is supposed to adjourn by Labor Day?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, first we finished the Antarctica Treaty. Secondly, on the rivers and harbors appropriations bill. Now minimum wage. It is fair to assume that could be followed with a secondary boycott bill. There are some authorizations that the President wants on which the Foreign Relations Committee must take action.

We must take action on the appropriations bill for Mutual Security. And then, pending over on the House side in the Rules Committee of the House is a school aid bill, also a housing bill, and then there may be others. So it depends entirely on how much the majority may want to accomplish in this session.

MR. ASHLEY: John Edwards, you have a question, the President wants 21 proposals passed or acted on.

MR. EDWARDS: Senator Dirksen there has been much discussion all this week about the President's message to Congress. We have heard claims, counter claims, criticism, praise, and the President's own explanation that it would be

inconsistent with him not to repeat these recommendations to Congress.

How many of these so-called 21 items do you think the session can act upon?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, that is one of those imponderables and I doubt very much whether anybody can give you a good, concrete answer. I have gone over the list pretty well. I submitted one, as you know, that was tabled just shortly after we got out from port in this session.

MR. EDWARDS: You are speaking of civil rights?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: The two proposals in the original package that I offered in February which were deleted, partly on my own motions, oddly enough, and then submitted them in the hope that we could round out that package, that is one.

Then there is the question of farm relief. The President believes there ought to be some action in this session on the theory that you can't wait until January. When you stop to consider that storage costs on the surplus wheat hoard alone run up to a thousand dollars a minute, that looks like something pretty important and pretty urgent.

Then there is an immigration proposal that is pending. A good many others. There is the omnibus judges bill. There is the area redevelopment bill, twice vetoed because it was

in a form that the President refused to take. But I introduced a new bill right after the veto, it is pending in the Senate Banking Committee, and I am hopeful we can get action on it. But we are not in control, that is the important thing to remember.

MR. ASHLEY: With this imposing list ahead of you, are you willing to make some prediction on when you will be able to leave Washington with all work done?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: All I know is the target is Labor Day or sometime before. Now that goes back then to the observation I just made a moment ago. After all, don't forget that in the Senate you have 66 Democrats and 34 Republicans. We do not run the show. It is for them to determine finally when they want to adjourn if they can summon up enough votes for sine die adjournment resolution, and that means they must determine how much or how little is to be enacted.

Speaking for myself, I am prepared to stay. In his message the President said "You ought to stay here until the task is done." I am quite willing.

MR. EDWARDS: The President also suggested during his news conference that it is silly to talk about taking weeks and months to get action on simple measures, and he was referring to his 21 item list.

Do you consider these simple things that could be disposed of quickly?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: There are a good many of these that could be disposed of without extended debate. I am not insensible to the fact that when you move into the field of civil rights or minimum wages that the impact is so great, the divergencies of viewpoint are so many that it does take a little more time.

But if it takes time, that is our duty. We are discharging a public responsibility here.

MR. EDWARDS: Regardless of time, are you going to try on every one of these 21 actions?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I don't know that we can try on every one of them but I will say this: I will make some kind of an endeavor on a good many of these because I do not want it said that all we did was to engage in a lot of semantic exercises and make speeches on the floor and didn't come up with concrete proposals and submit them for action in the Senate and in the House.

MR. ROLFSON: Senator, based on what you said yourself after the leaders' meeting at the White House the other day, a sort of a suggestion that you might put many of these proposals forward in the Senate as riders to existing legislation?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: That is right.

MR. ROLFSON: Are you definitely planning that?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: You see you have to have some

familiarity with Senate rules. If you recess, you have no morning hour. If you have no morning hour, you are stultified somewhat in what you can do, because when we had a morning hour I offered the civil rights bill and asked for first reading. Then I was in a position to ask for second reading and there could be objection and it would have to go over for a day.

Now if you are shut off by that parliamentary device, then of course you have to chop it up somewhat and offer it as riders or amendments to bills that come. And even there you are limited. You can offer no legislation to an appropriation bill. You would have to suspend the rule and get a two-thirds vote. So you have to wait for a legislative proposal to come to the floor and then offer it to that.

MR. ASHLEY: Because of the action in the Congress at this time -- I am thinking in terms of the people back home -- is it a question of too much jockeying back and forth because it is a political year, or are you really working hard?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: We are really laboring earnestly, quite aside from the fact that this is a political year. Frankly, these things were recited in the President's State of the Union Message. He refreshed the Congress on it the first week in May and you will have observed in the message that came up on Monday of this week,

"I go back to that message and reassert and renew my interest and ask for legislation on these specific items." So they have been here a long time. This is old ground that we are plowing.

MR. ROLFSON: Well, Senator, how are you going to plow all this old ground within this so-called target date of Labor Day?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I didn't set a target date.

MR. EDWARDS: Senator, why did you pick civil rights from the old ground to start out with? I mean after all you spent an awful lot of time on that and there was a bill on that passed. Why did you pick that as the first thing to introduce?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: First it was in the package we introduced on the 15th of February. Secondly, to get action in the civil rights field we had to make some concessions. That didn't mean we were conceding our convictions. We were simply being realistic and tried to get a bill.

Now then we come along with this session and the President says "I'd like to have those two provisions restored." So I undertook to get them restored and I failed in that endeavor.

MR. ASHLEY: Do you think we will have any civil rights bill this session?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I don't know, but we haven't lost interest in it.

MR. ASHLEY: It is not a question of losing interest. Senator Javits said that he will bring up another bill, but he indicated that he would bring it up only after all other important business was taken up and passed or not passed.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: My friend, in this business I just have to say you never make a confession.

The old motto is "Never say die and never take your eyes off the stars." So here is the summit, there are those two items in civil rights, to round out that package, and consequently I work at it. And so long as we are in session, hope springs eternal.

MR. ASHLEY: I am trying to be realistic, Senator.

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SENATOR DIRKSEN: I am too.

MR. ASHLEY: Do you think there will be a Civil Rights bill passed?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I hope to consummate it. I may fail.

MR. ROLFSON: Senator, we are talking now about having our eyes on the stars. That is a long way off for Labor Day, isn't it?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Not in the space age.

MR. ROLFSON: Not in the space age?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, no.

MR. ROLFSON: There seems to be some feeling among many members on the Hill that this is going to run a couple weeks into September. How do you feel about that?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well I wouldn't know because I am not in charge of the program. I am just the Minority Leader. I have only got thirty-four troops on the battle line. There are sixty-six on the other side.

MR. ROLFSON: Well let's say the other side. If the troops on the other side are able to get a certain closing date on this session, adjournment date; they go to the President and say "We are through." Suppose the President isn't satisfied and wants to call them back. Is there a chance for a special session?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I cannot speak for the President.

I do know, however, that always when you wind up a session, he wants to be notified. He could very well say "Look, You haven't taken very much action on this program that I have submitted to you." From there on it is anybody's guess as to what will happen and whether or not he may have in mind, if he doesn't get the things that he thinks he should have, because of the urgency of some of these measures, he may very conceivably say "Well, there ought to be an extraordinary session," and then that presupposes this question: When?

But those are speculations and I do not venture too deeply in that field. I am just dealing with varities of the moment.

MR. ROLFSON: I would like to follow this just one moment, if I may, Charles:

Has the President indicated this at all to you in any of your leadership meetings that he might under some circumstances be prepared to call a special session?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I wouldn't know. We are going to have a leadership meeting on Tuesday, next, and we may have some discussion of it at that time, but there has been no discussion of it thus far. And I always try to be very meticulous and never try to put words in the President's mouth or to commit him, or even to conjecture as to what he will or will not do.

MR. ASHLEY: Let's get to specifics now. The minimum wage: that will be debated as you said perhaps until Thursday?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, it is conceivable that it could run that long.

MR. ASHLEY: Do you think that there will be a compromise of \$1.15 an hour rather than Kennedy's proposal of \$1.25? Do you think that everybody could go along with that?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Actually the problem has not been too much the wage feature of these amendments. The real problem has been coverage.

MR. ASHLEY: By "coverage," you mean how many more millions will be brought into this. The question of the five million.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: In part, but there is a fundamental question involved here, and I certainly concur with the argument made by Senator Ervin on the majority side that what you are virtually doing is tearing the commerce clause of the Constitution to shreds and that is almost what this bill does. You do, of course, hang on some limitations in the form of a dollar sign, but a subsequent Congress can reduce the million dollar limit on retail businesses. Another Congress can bring it down to \$250,000. Another Congress, once the principle has been established, can wipe

it out altogether. And then the long arm of centralized bureaucratic government can reach out and take into account the comings and goings in the affairs of little business enterprises that are so essentially not in interstate commerce, but wholly local, and in intrastate commerce. That is the fundamental that is involved here.

MR. ROLFSON: You sound like you are arguing against any minimum wage bill at all.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: No, I just want to modify this and perfect it. That is the reason I have a substitute substantially like the bill that passed the House.

MR. EDWARDS: Well, Senator, without asking you to put words in the President's mouth, has he indicated to you now in your conversations in advance of this that he will veto the wage bill, with the coverage to which you are now objecting?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Definitely not. The President is interested in a bill.

MR. ROLFSON: He said a moderate increase.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: That is right. He said so in his message.

MR. ASHLEY: Does that mean \$1.15?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, we don't put the emphasis there and I don't believe that it would hit off on that at all. Our problem here is the more fundamental one of how far we

go and how far we reach out to bring these little intrastate businesses within the purview of the Constitution by simply shreading that portion of the Constitution.

MR. EDWARDS: Will he object to that with a veto?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, the President is a pretty fundamental person, let me say.

MR. ASHLEY: All right, Senator. Now let's go to medical care for the aged and aging. That is worked through the Senate's Finance Committee. You perhaps will have a moderate bill where the federal government and the state government sort of divvy up and the people who are available for it anté up, too, as against the Forand Bill where they increased the social security.

What do you think will come of that?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let me give you a second answer to your original observation, when you talk about things being bogged down.

Now the Senate Finance Committee finished action on this social security bill, involving many amendments which are not objectionable, and then the help for the aged provision. That is the one that invokes all the controversy.

Now as soon as that action was over yesterday afternoon, some of the majority members, as I understand from reading the print, said that their own platform had been repudiated and that they would carry the fight to the floor of the

Senate.

Well, I anticipate that that is going to be a pretty rugged fight, and then you will discover, of course, that most of the speeches will be on the other side of the aisle and I suppose they will carry the burden of the fight, because in the main we shall not be too unhappy with what the Senate Finance Committee reported, and it may admit of one or two amendments, but I am pretty sure that there are others who want to go infinitely further and among the substitutes that will be offered will be the Forand Bill, which brings it within the framework of the Social Security Act, meaning of course the payroll tax.

MR. EDWARDS: Well, Senator, this medical aid problem was one of the items the President listed and yet the Administration's plan, or the Flemming plan was not presented to the Finance Committee. How was that? And will you try to bring that up on the floor?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: The Flemming plan was available for presentation. It was formalized and introduced by Senator Saltonstall of Massachusetts. That is the Flemming plan. That is the Administration plan. Now actually there were eight substitutes in so far as I could calendar them. How many were alluded to, how many were considered, I do not know. There was one by Anderson, one by Saltonstall, one by Javits -- I should say in each case the distinguished

Senators from these states, but I am just trying to economize on time. So I could list all of them as substitutes for that portion of the Mills Bill which came over from the House. Now all or some part of them may be offered and you can see what a discussion that will provoke, and that might take a week, I do not know.

MR. ASHLEY: Do you think we will get a medical aid bill?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I hope we will, and I hope it will be an agreeable one. And I think the Senate Finance Committee has done an excellent job and this gives me a chance to say something that has meaning and purpose. The vote was 12 to 5, as I recall, and of the 12 who voted this out six were Republicans and six were Democrats.

MR. ASHLEY: That would indicate that we will get a medical aid bill of some sort.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I hope so, and I hope it will be in form. And outside the framework of the Social Security Act, and that it will merit the approval of the President. But it will remain to be seen what the final action will be.

MR. EDWARDS: Senator, do you expect the President to ask this session of Congress for more money for defense?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I doubt it very much. Actually when we finished in July we gave the President about \$650 million in round figures over and above the budget request. Now

with the transfer authority they have under the Defense Appropriation Act, plus this additional money, that may be adequate for all purposes, and then when Congress returns in January, if there is an urgent, or immediate need, you can always cure it by means of a supplemental, or a deficiency appropriation bill.

MR. EDWARDS: Senator Johnson says this money has been impounded and the President denies that this is so. Is this a question of semantics? Are they fighting over the words "freeze" and "impound"?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Yes. I participated in that discussion. It came about through a letter which was offered and placed in the record to the effect these excess funds ought to be deferred and reserved until 1962, to the maximum practical extent. But what is the maximum practical extent?

When you talk about practical, this situation changes day after day. The President is a realist. He takes account of Africa, of Europe, of Asia and everything else, and whenever funds are necessary, he is prepared to move in and has the necessary background with which to do it. And by way of fortification, I recite the time he devoted in his speech to the convention in Chicago on this whole defense and military aspect.

MR. ASHLEY: Mr. Senator, Vice President Nixon seems to

be the quiet man at this session. I see him running around the corridors of the Capitol building, always with one briefcase under each arm, doing a lot of home work, but he isn't making any speeches on the floor. It is a sort of self-imposed rule that he is not even holding personal press conferences here in Washington.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Could I interpose at that point?

MR. ASHLEY: Yes, I would like to have you.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: The Vice President has no right to make a speech on the floor. Constitutionally he is the presiding officer of the Senate and it is only by dispensation that sometimes he talks from the chair. As, for instance, when we have distinguished guests from foreign countries. That is one of those flexibilities that we indulge. But it isn't the function of the Vice President, who is not a member of the Senate as such. He is a part of the Senate, because he applies the rules, he interprets them, he breaks a tie. And so it is not expected, and he doesn't participate in floor discussion in the Senate.

MR. ASHLEY: You understand what I was driving at. Whether the Vice President, Mr. Nixon, and Senator Kennedy should take time away from the Senate and go off campaigning.

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, you give me an excellent opportunity

to express a very realistic point of view. We have joked back and forth as you know on the floor of the Senate every day, about who isn't on the floor and who is.

Well, after all, the Senate and for that matter the whole Congress is not merely a legislative forum, it is also something of a political arena, because this is a political form of government that operates with two major parties, one that has the stewardship of government and one that holds that party to accountability and so in the scheme of things we recognize that the highest office must be filled first by having a party nominee and secondly having the nominee present himself to the party.

I used to say the way to get out of your office and get out here is to put on your hat, say good bye to your office staff and say "You will see me when you see me." I have been the worst captive here in Washington. I have scarcely been out of this man's town. Twice since January. Once to make a speech at Cooper Union to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Lincoln speech, and the second time when I went to the convention in Chicago. That is the only time I have been away from here.

But if I want to get away from here, there is only one thing to do: Walk out.

MR. EDWARDS: What about Mr. Nixon's role now, is his relationship with you, as Minority Leader, changed in any

way since the convention? Is he taking a more active role or participating more with your --

SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, the Vice President has always taken an active part, for the very good reason that more and more responsibility has been thrust upon him in this Administration. He is the chairman of the National Security Council. The President has given him other responsibilities.

MR. EDWARDS: But specifically on getting legislation through Congress, now. Has his role changed in any way?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I confer with the Vice President like I have always conferred, because he has a deep and abiding interest, and he is an integral part of this Administration.

How strange it would be if he was casual or cavalier about it and had no interest. That would be an amazing state of affairs.

MR. ROLFSON: Senator, what can you tell us about your own relations generally with the Majority Leader, Senator Johnson?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: My relations with the Majority Leader have always been pleasant and very felicitious. It is sometimes forgotten that we have known each other rather intimately for 27 years or more and we realize that the leadership in the Senate sort of recognizes that it is a two-way street, for otherwise the Senate would be in a state of deadlock and stalemate most of the time. And so we get

Along, even though we disagree.

MR. ROLFSON: Well, I want to follow that up with this: Has your relationship in any way changed now that Senator Johnson is the Vice Presidential nominee of the Democrats?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: No. He may have a greater feeling of urgency about some legislation, and I may simply say "You say we could finish this in four days or five days, or three days" and I may say "Look, this is an important measure. It is going to take longer than that." And we are not dragging our feet, contrary to what has been said on the Senate floor and in the press. When you take measures that have wide application over the country and that will be on the books from now on, that is an important thing. So we believe we best serve the public interest by giving them full and fair and extensive consideration. It is, after all, the world's greatest deliberative body and we do not want to depart from character.

MR. ASHLEY: We see you and Senator Johnson balancing on the balls of your feet on that first step in the Senate every day, side by side.

What I am trying to get at is, is Senator Johnson the Majority Leader still, or is Kennedy?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: He is the Majority Leader. The Majority Leader is selected by his party in the Senate, and

he is very definitely the Majority Leader.

MR. ASHLEY: Is he still running things?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: And recognized as such.

MR. ASHLEY: Is he running things, though?

MR. ASHLEY: Well, I recognize him as the Majority Leader and when I want to sit with him on matters relating to scheduling and so forth, I go to him always.

MR. ASHLEY: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Senator Dirksen. This has been OPEN HEARING. We have tried to give you somewhat of a behind the scenes session of what this bobtailed session of Congress is going to be like.

This is Charles Ashley in Washington.

THE ANNOUNCER: This has been OPEN HEARING with ABC commentators Charles Ashley, John Edwards and John Rolfsen. Today's guest has been Senator Everett Dirksen, Republican of Illinois.

OPEN HEARING is produced by Helen Jean Rogers, directed by Richard Armstrong, originates in Washington, D. C., and has been a Public Affairs presentation of ABC News.

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