

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON AND CONGRESSMAN JAMES C. WRIGHT, JR.
TELEPHONE DISCUSSION, 1968

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Jim.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Mr. President.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: How you getting along?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Okay. How are you, Sir?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, I've had a long hard week but a good one, I think, and I think we made— had a good meeting in Honolulu, and I think our forces are in better shape for the attack than we've ever been before in Saigon. And I think we'll have a test, a tough month, but I think it's gonna work out alright. But, Jim, this old Billboard Cramer up there—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —yeah—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —you're not whorin' around with him are you?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: I'm trying to keep him from offering a separate motion on [indistinct]—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —well, he'll do it. Well, let's just, let's just let him do it over the nation. If they just wreck us, let 'em wreck us, but—God Almighty—let's don't let him take this penalty provision out because this damn billboard lobby has run this country time ad infinitum. I voted with 'em one time because Bob Kerr made me on a tie vote over in the Senate before I learned better, but I've never seen such a goddamn group of selfish eager hogs. They won't even let people sit down and try to reason with 'em, and I'm told that they're trying to take out this penalty provision—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: I'll tell you—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —and, our people say, put in a meaningless bonus that won't amount to a damn thing. And I know Cramer—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —Yeah—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —whatever he does I know is evil toward me and I know is evil toward—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —Well, he's not our friend. I know that.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, he is a mean one. I look at him, and you can look at him, and tell that.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: The little devil won on the floor [indistinct]—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —Yes, that's right. And we just, we were all busy doing everything else and nobody would just stand up and slug him.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: You remember—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —Like the other day when I had this fight over here on Trinity. I had a goddamn—I didn't know that you knew what you were talking about, but I had a Secretary of the Army who was absolutely, one hundred percent against us. I had a Secretary of Transportation wrote the meanest damn letter I ever saw and ought to be fired for it. I dislike Alex Boyd, but that was a terrible thing. I directed a budget—I had to call in and just stomp him in the teeth. But those things do happen, and while we were messing around on Vietnam and all these other things, why they've got a little sentiment goin' with 'em because of the expenditures and the war and everything else, and—but it's gonna cost the highway lobby more than that. I'm gonna, I'm gonna look after their interests best I can, and I just don't think—if we go down in Vietnam or billboards or any other place—we ought to go down with our flag flying. We oughtn't just let 'em take us over.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: You would, you would rather—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —I don't want to take a step backward.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: All right.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: If they gonna do it under Humphrey, all right. If they want to, if they want the billboards to come back in, to start puttin' up big 5 cent hamburgers "once seen, never forgotten" that's all right with me. I don't wanna do it--I think that penalty provision on billboards ought to stay in there.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: All right. Let me understand your position on it, and I'll try to see if I can get it done now. I got Cramer to the point, at least, that he would agree to a penalty that would deny any 319(b) money--that's scenic enhancement money--to any state that didn't comply with sections 1 and 2--that's billboard and junkyard control. That's some penalty that he's already agreed to. Now, what I've been tryin' to do is to get an agreement where we can go back to both houses without having a separate vote on the billboard and asking for separate instructions because it stands out like a sore thumb in this climate where all the damn demagogues are tryin' to prove they saved money, and they reach out there and flick a little thing like this and then go back and beat their breast and claim that they saved a whole hell of a lot of money, you know.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I think that's right. I think that's true, and I think that is the climate, and I sure agree with you on that. On the other hand, I believe I'd rather lose fighting than to let the--and I think the day will come, and I think it's gonna be pretty extreme, after we get outta here when they're gonna look at some of these things and see what the Cramers did to 'em. Because I think they're selfish interest people.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: I made the best speech I thought I could'a made, and I was satisfied with it, and I thought I'd won, but I didn't, on the house floor to keep him from cuttin out all the money--and all of it. But let me, let me understand now. You would like to have the penalty provision back in, and you'd like to have the Randall amendment out. Now I think we can get agreement of a majority of the house [indistinct] just a party-line vote on that and--maybe--we can get the Senate to steal the papers. They're not tied to 'em. Take 'em over there and vote first which would give us just an up and down vote on the whole bit. Now that'd be a little dirty shenanigan but--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —Well, that's what I'd do. That's exactly what I'd do. I'd just--

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —[indistinct]--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's right, and Randolph'll do that. Just let him take it and tell him to go on and get it out of there before Dirksen leaves to go to the convention. They got to [indistinct] and do a little business but they [indistinct] I guess. Aren't you gonna be here Monday-Tuesday?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Yes sir. Yes sir.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well maybe if you-- aren't you gonna meet this morning?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Meet this morning? Yes sir.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just get 'em to agree to it, and y'all can have a 4-3 vote. Who is, who is against you on it? Cramer, and who else?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Well, the three republicans: Cramer—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —Is it that closely developed—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —Clausen/Clawson [88th Congress members with homophonic names], Harsha and Cramer.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, that's right.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Now, the guys on the democratic side have got some real serious reservations about the way that [indistinct] has administered the program but I can make 'em go along. Kluczynski and Ed—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —Edmonds--

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —Edmondson, and, of course, Mr. Fallon. I can make them go along. If--If there'll be a little disposition on the part the Senate to give the House one little thing that I think would probably solve the whole thing and that would be paragraph C without the Randall amendment, and that's just a restatement of what Secretary Boyd said to Mr. [indistinct] in a letter: that he would recognize state determination of what constituted customary practice on size and spacing and lighting. If they can give 'em that, I can get the rest of our boys to go along on these other things.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And get the Senate to take the papers. Well, I'll--I don't know anything about the paragraph C or the Randall committee, but I'll get Barefoot to call you right back and get him to talk to Boyd, and then I'll try to get him to get Randolph to take the papers and see if we can handle it that way. And God bless your soul—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —Well, thank you--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're a can-do man—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —Let me ask you--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —Say, did we—we got you trained to things, Senator?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Sure as hell did, and I think we're working on the thing now.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, I guess that'll be the major cronyism of the camp.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Well, I hope it doesn't hurt you. It sure as hell helps the rest of us. Mr. President, two things: you did get the letter from TCU--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —I haven't seen it.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Well, it came in on--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —I wanna see it. Oh, God bless.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —[indistinct] offer you carte blanche, so whatever kind of a program you want--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —All right—

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —It's a beautiful letter.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Oh that's wonderful.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: I called him and told Jim Jones to be on the lookout for it.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, I'll tell you this: I'll do Jim Congressman Wright's--

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —You—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —'cause, well I'm just gonna—I'm a right/Wright [word play] man. You're my hero down there, and I expect you to stay on the job, keep yourself alert, mentally fit, physically well.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Well, thank you. Ask Jim for that letter—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —I'll get it today. What's the second thing?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: The second thing is the other thing you'd asked me to do [indistinct], now they have submitted a--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —[indistinct] —

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —a lease agreement—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —All right. Do you know what it is—do you know the terms?

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: Well, they submitted it to Youngblood, and they've—

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —That's good. That's good. God bless you.

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: —[indistinct] a copy of it yesterday.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's good. Keep in touch with me. And let me know on this. If I'm not here, let Larry—Larry Barefoot know—Larry [indistinct].

CONGRESSMAN WRIGHT: If you'll have Barefoot call me, I'll just wait right here, and maybe he can call Randolph and we'll just work--

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: —I'll do it.

[END of telephone conversation]