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Barbara Cline
Archivist

CONVERSATION BETWEEN MAYOR DALEY AND THE PRESIDENT
Thursday, March 14, 1968, 5:57 p.m.

P: Hello.

D: Mr. President.

P: Dick, how are you?

D: How are you doing.

P: Well, I've had a rough day. I missed my lunch and my nap but I had a long visit with Dean Acheson and I spent a good while with Clark Clifford this afternoon and also my advisers on other matters. I have a monetary crisis on my hands on account of an international, serious thing. We are calling all the bankers in. We have a very bad deal there. Our friend visited with Clifford this morning and I guess he has told you what has happened.

D: Yes.

P: They demanded a public Presidential statement calling for a complete re-evaluation of what we have done in Vietnam and it amounted to an admission that we were changing our course and we were in error out there. We told them we couldn't do that because it would be a repudiation of all of our men, the President, the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State --

even Secretary McNamara. They submitted to the group of men the types of which were all violent doves -- none of them moderate -- none of them unannounced -- all of them were very strong that we ought to pull out and this was a bad situation, including Senator Kennedy, and we told them that if we got one Senator without getting the Chairman of the Foreign Relations and the Chairman of the Armed Services that they would just run me out. And if I started to get in a group without all the Senators on it, I would just have a hell of a time. I told them that I ---- third, this being a price that the Senator was exhorting from me in order not to run in a primary would be all the -- Clifford -- all of them -- thought it would be regarded as a very bad political deal -- he was on the ticker that he was announcing and was going to be in California and now Johnson comes in and publicly makes an announcement that we would be glad to counsel with men like Reischauer and Ridgeway and Bundy and Vance and Senator Bob Kennedy if he would give us any plan. he had we would like to have it -- we wanted to work with him ... we would carefully study it and consider it and we were doing that every day from A to Z, but to force us to come out and

publicly say that we were wrong or that we were changing our course or we were uncertain of our government, of our President, or of our Commander, it was unanimous and I had a substantial group of the ablest men and they all agreed it would just be considered as a deal with him and that pretty soon it would leak out that he had changed the course of the war and the President had been a spineless wonder.

After Clifford told them all these things, Sorensen came back and called one of my staff members and said that it wasn't necessary that all these men be on and that they would like to talk about the President if he was flexible and my staff member told him, "Yes we would be glad to visit -- receive any of them, including the Senator, on any plan he had or any suggestion."

I just spent two hours today with Dean Acheson who had been over at the Defense Department/being briefed for a week and over at the State Department listening to all the men. And he told me that men from outside usually just complicated -- they didn't have the information -- they weren't down in the details of it -- and that he had talked

to General DePuy and he had talked to the men in the Diplomatic end and he had talked to those on the Southeast Asia desk and that he felt like we ought to give them the number of men and they ought to be a limited number and then we ought to say to them, "Now, this is what we have and you've got to cut your cloth to fit your garment," --= that I had met with Acheson today and that I would meet with Ridgeway and Bundy and Vance and the others from day to day and it wasn't a question of listening to one or two men -- it was a question of getting the best advice we could but we didn't think we could have a Presidential acknowledgement of error and reflection on the good men who are trying to carry on here -- that we would confer and counsel with him and with any of them and, particularly, we would like to talk to Sorensen. Sorensen said, "Well, he didn't know -- that he was the only one that was advising him not to run but he believed he was going to run," and that's about the way he left it.

D: Is there any possibility of your announcing your own committee headed by Clifford?

P: They say that will just pull the rug out from under us and be the most encouraging thing Hanoi has had. We have said in public testimony that Clifford is examining this from A to Z, from the standpoint of our troops and our policy. But these folks want us to admit error and then they want to use it against us. And we just can't do that. Clifford went into it very carefully with them and told them that if we had a public Presidential statement that we were re-evaluating -- every mother that lost a boy would say, "My God, why didn't he do it before my kid died?" And there is not anything wrong with what we are doing. We can't do anything better. It would be hypocritical to indicate that we were either short of information or we were not sure of what we are doing because we do think we are ...

D: It is apparent that many things have happened -- all these documentations -- that a lot of things that are said are -- have not actually happened. What I am saying is it's always when a man puts a new man into a department like you do the Secretary of Defense, there is always the implication that he comes in with the idea of not

necessarily following what's been there, but he takes an entirely new look at the whole situation. We do that even on a local level.

This would not be a Presidential admission any place, but to just ask his new Secretary of Defense, sitting with these other men you talk about, having a complete appraisal because you are going to have to have it anyhow -- because you are going to have to have it because of the requests that are being made for additional manpower. And I don't see there is a great confession or admission by anyone. Because we even do it on the local level where you have a new Department head. Many times you have the request to him, as well as the people along with him, to make a reappraisal of the whole situation involving his operation. That's all that would do. But you would put Sorensen on that and you would put Acheson, and you would put all these different people on there because they are advising him anyhow, as I understand, and advising you. And the only thing you would do with this fellow is to call his hand to see if he is interested and to see if he is going -- and wants to go -- because this, as I see it, is going to

tear our country apart wider than ever,
regardless ----

P: It's going to hurt us. It's going to hurt us and it's
going to hurt us bad. I don't believe thought, Dick,
that it is going to hurt us as much as if the people
in the country thought the President was making
a deal with a man who was trying to blackmail him
into doing it. I think --

D: I agree with you there, but I

P: When Clifford talked to him today a long time, he came
to the conclusion that we just should not be in the public
position of saying ---

D: that we were doing this (Daley interrupts)

P: Yes, he just said ... we will take the advice of [REDACTED]
every man I have talked to ... I asked Acheson about it
and he just blew up. He just said, "My God, of course
not." And he's been Secretary of State during all the
Korean thing and all the troubles with Roosevelt and
Truman and the wisest men we've got. And very frankly,
Dick, I don't want to say this because it sounds bad but
there are some people that thought this was the most
arrogant proposal they ever heard and the most unrealistic --

that a President that is carrying the load that we are on the economy - with the tax problems, with the market losing 12 points, with losing half a billion in gold today and probably will lose a billion tomorrow, and all of these problems -- then this man is calling and saying "you've got to publicly admit that you have been wrong all the time."

D: Well, I think one thing you've got to watch, though, Mr. President, is the idea that a lot of people interpret what we are trying to do is to see if we can't bring some unity, even out of all the diversion groups. And I think --

P: Dick, I've never created any disunity in my life. I haven't said an unkind word about this man and he has been kicking at me every day some way -- I'm wrong on cities. I'm wrong on this or that. I kept him in my Cabinet. I went and campaigned for him. I spent an hour and a half yesterday with his adviser Sorensen and I had Clifford spend two hours with him this morning. But what he says is "You please certify that you are not good." Now I can't do that.

D: No. Well, I didn't get it ... he just said that ...

P: Well, you take it from me. My best advisors listened to it and were unanimous.

D: In their opinion ...

P: Yes, sir.

D: Well, what do we do from here on in as far as he is concerned. Let him go?

P: We just work like unshirted hell to get every vote at this thing and I think the people will feel he is self-centered and pretty selfish. While I am trying to do a job for the nation, he is out picking at me.

D: Well, I see ... There isn't any way, then, to keep on the string ...

P: They tell me that he is determined to run and he has announced. I asked Marvin to call you this morning ...

D: Yes, he called me.

P: He talked to this man. He (Kennedy) went out there last week. He has been going around the country. He went to Iowa. He had Governor Hughes meet him out there. He is trying his best to get these things and he saw that McCarthy got some votes. He has misjudged it,

in my judgment. There are 100,000 votes up there, but what we are doing -- they voted for Nixon voted for Rockefeller, voted for Johnson and voted for others, and there are 100,000 one way and 25 the other. But he is interpreting and he hit us -- New Hampshire hit us at a very bad time. We've got worse times ahead now, but we've got to save our country. It doesn't make any difference who is elected and that is what I am going to try to do the next ...

D: But your advisors threw out this thing also on the Presidential candidate? Are they opposed to that?

P: They said that any indication of uncertainty, Dick, just makes ...

D: (Interrupts) I know but I mean -- you recall that even Roosevelt did it a couple of times in the Landon thing in 1936 and on the farm question, even in the middle of the campaign. He sent for the people . . .

P: Oh, we do that all the time. I went to Eisenhower the other day across the country. We will be fully briefing Nixon and the others from time to time and Bobby - if he runs - and McCarthy. We will keep all of them informed and

be glad to have their suggestions. I sent for Goldwater two or three times during the 1964 campaign.

D: I know you did. Well, good luck to you, Mr. President.

P: God bless you, Dick. You stay in there and help us.

D: Fine.

P: Goodbye.