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Transcript only of this conversation; there is no recording.

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TIME: 5:32 PM

CALLER: George Ball

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Charlaine McCauley
Archivist

The President (A)
to Hon. George Ball (B)

April 24, 1968 5:32p

A I hate to call you, and I understand that your circumstances are difficult, and this is not something that is an emergency, but I feel I must mention it to you before I take some action. Goldberg is leaving, and I would rather have you than anybody I know for the six months period. I don't know about your particular circumstances, but I hate to make a decision and then have it said that I could have had you. Things will be slow, the non-proliferation treaty -- and we'll have a new President in January. I don't know how active they'll be. In any event, I always think of you when I need someone for a job that requires good judgment. I don't want you to feel that if you say no to the President that it's a turn-down, because it's not. I don't think it's of great urgency -- to your country or to me. On the other hand, I don't know if being in that assignment for six months would be something that would be gratifying to you.

B Mr. President, I really can't give you an immediate answer. I've always told you that anything that you felt strongly enough about, I would do without question. May I have overnight to consider it?

A You sure can.

B I am grateful to you for thinking of me, but I have a new business in which I've become a partner, and I've got to see what obligation there is there.

A I'm reluctant to talk to you, but you have been a model. You've been loyal to the country, to your colleagues, to the President, and to your principles. You embody all the fine things that I can ask for in a man. I don't want you to do it if it is going to interfere the slightest. It's not like asking you to come here or make a trip or take on a special assignment. We can get somebody else, but on the other hand, I think you've had all the tough things there are to have, and if this would be

pleasant for a six month period, and if you think it wouldn't hurt your firm, I'd like for you to have it. There is a list of ten people on my desk and it begins with George Ball, and that came from Secy Rusk, and that represents your former boss' opinion and Clark Clifford's opinion. Don't mention it to anyone except your partners and your wife. I want to announce Goldberg's successor when he announces he's leaving.

B Could I have until noon tomorrow?

A You can. . . . you can have anything you want as long as I'm President.

B That's wonderful. . . . I couldn't be more gratified.

A Well, I don't know anybody who's contributed more to the government. I told Clark Clifford that he had sat behind the scenes all these years, and I would like for the people to know a little about him. If it would mean anything to you, and I think that in 120 countries, it might, and if they would give you a leave from June to January. I think it will be a fairly light period, they'll meet in the fall if we want them to. It will be up to you to run it and tell us what you want to do. If you want it, call me back by noon tomorrow. I didn't hear your television appearance, but they told me it was a statesmanlike production, and I want to salute you.

B That's wonderful. Thank you.

A Thank you, George.

B Let me call you tomorrow.