

STATEMENT BY SENATOR LYNDON B. JOHNSON
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A few days from now we begin choosing our next national leadership.

The final choice will be made in November -- by all the people. But what you have to choose between in November will be decided for you at the two national conventions.

I know this responsibility weighs heavily on the 6,000 Americans who are delegates. I am sure they have the prayers of the 179 million Americans for whom they will be acting.

But what matters most in July may count for very little in the long and perilous years beyond.

After July, the bandwagons will be silent.

The dark horses will be out to pasture.

And we will stand face-to-face with whatever destiny this century holds for us -- with one man, the one man we choose this year, standing out in front to lead us.

All the forces of evil in this world will stand poised, ready to strike at freedom through whatever weakness he may show. Those forces will have no mercy for innocence, no gallantry toward inexperience, no patience toward errors.

It is a lot for any man to ask for such a job and argue that he is qualified for it.

Since 1937, in FDR's time, I have known the Presidency -- and the men in it -- intimately. I cannot truthfully say that any man is qualified for it in advance.

In days gone by, Democrats have had Woodrow Wilsons and Franklin Roosevelts and Al Smiths. But none of the conventions which nominated these giants opened with the choice already made. None was nominated on the first ballot. Even so recently as 1952, Governor Stevenson was not chosen until the third ballot.

Unlike the Republican Party, our Democratic Party has always had open and free conventions -- and our greatest leaders have been nominated at our freest conventions.

Democrats -- Democratic delegates -- are going to make up their minds together in convention, as they have done before.

In these times, a few days can be a long time.

Sixty days ago the future looked vastly different than now. Men were talking confidently of far different things than now. Then came the Paris Conference -- and Mr. Khrushchev unmasked the future in all its grim challenge to us.

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A few weeks ago the President left Washington here -- with every reason to believe he would soon be visiting a strong bastion of freedom in the Far Pacific.

Within hours, the whole perspective of the Pacific's whole future was changed for us and for the rest of this century.

The American Presidency itself has a far different role than it did when some began seeking to tie up those who will be convention delegates.

The choice we make in July -- in both our parties -- must take into account much that could not be seen six weeks or six days ago.

What all this may mean to individual men matters little. The party nominations are not "owed" to anyone.

The future of America -- not the future of individual men -- is at stake.

My name will be placed in nomination at the Democratic Convention.

I understand that many will support my name on the first ballot -- and a good many more on the second. Some of my supporters are even saying that by the third ballot votes for me may reach a majority.

Whether this is true or not, I cannot say -- nor can anyone.

The men and women who will be casting those votes do not know themselves. And I myself would never try to tell them that they should bind themselves in advance to any choice except the choice of what is best for America.

In their considerations, I shall be honored to have the delegates consider my candidacy.

I have a post of duty and responsibility here in Washington -- as the Majority Leader of the United States Senate. Because of that duty -- a duty to all the people -- I cannot be absent when there is public business at stake.

Those who have engaged in active campaigns have missed hundreds of these votes.

This I could not do -- for my country or my party.

Someone has to tend the store.

As much as I would have liked to say "yes" to those who have asked me to make an early announcement of my candidacy for the Democratic nomination I could not do so while Congress was in session.

Now that is changed. I am, as of this moment, a candidate. I am a candidate for the Democratic nomination for the office of President of the United States.

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There are some observations I want to make on the presidency.

A President's job is to maintain not his own position but the position of America -- the position of the free alliance -- against all the evil dangers now gathering.

If he himself is narrowly partisan if he himself is a divisive influence, if he himself is inexperienced in making government work, he becomes a weak link in the whole chain of the Free World.

Since Woodrow Wilson, the American Presidency has been looked to as the world's chief office of peace-making and leadership for freedom.

In many of the years since -- especially the last thirty years -- the American Presidency has been filled by men who had or quickly won great international prestige and influence.

Now the Communists are moving in -- to kill off, downgrade the new Presidency as a world influence.

If they can destroy the world's trust in this office, the Communists can destroy the leadership of freedom itself.

That is why -- after the Paris Conference -- I, for one, felt so strongly, as one who shares the responsibilities of national leadership that we should not do Mr. Khrushchev's divisive work for him.

I did not -- and I will not -- leap in to chew on President Eisenhower, personally, just as I have not and will not spent my time now trying to destroy any in my party or other parties who might come to this high position.

Mistakes have been made -- serious and inexcusable ones.

But my interest -- and I believe the interest of most Americans -- is in curing those mistakes, avoiding them, not in exploiting them for small partisan gains.

Because the next President of the United States -- whoever he may be -- will not be a hero President known to the world, it is many times more important than ever that he be able to make our freedom secure by making our system fully work.

The next President is not going to be a talking President -- or a traveling President. He is going to be a working President.

He must work on America's position in the world.

His job is to convince the world -- both our enemies and our allies -- that America is strong and freedom is strong.

He can't wring his hands that America is second-rate -- because America is not second-rate. He can't cry out about moral decay -- because this generation is not a generation of decay.

Certainly America's voice will be an uninspiring voice if it can do no more than argue against growth, against raising our standards, against helping our aged and our young, against improving the people's health, against creating new opportunity, against aiding the world's underdeveloped areas.

To lead in the world, America must now more than ever -- be a symbol of justice for all. We must in our own land eradicate and erase injustice wherever it appears.

There are no problems our system cannot answer.

But to do these things, we must have in our national leadership a man able to stand against the challenge of the communist world.

There will be little time to learn the job.

We can only anticipate that the next President will be greeted by the threat of a Russian submarine base in Cuba, less than 100 miles from our shores. He will be met by efforts to penetrate internally into Republics of this Hemisphere. He will be met by new ultimatums over Berlin. He will be met by attacks upon the security of American bases throughout the world -- by insults to the American flag and embassies abroad -- by indignities against our citizens everywhere.

Feeling as I do about the American Presidency -- about the awesome tasks before our next national leadership -- I would not presume to tell my fellow Democrats that I am the only man they should consider for this job or to demand that any delegate vote for me. I am not going to go elbowing through 179 million Americans -- pushing aside other Senators, Governors, Congressmen -- to shout, "Look at me -- and at nobody else."

I only want my fellow Democrats, my fellow Americans, to look long and hard and wisely to find the right man.

We of the Democratic Party have built a record of responsibility.

Americans have approved.

From the position of outs in Congress, in the Statehouses, in the City Halls, we have -- in just six years moved to the position of ins, holding now the strongest majority position any party has held in modern times.

Responsibility has won the trust and the votes of the nation.

I am sure that responsibility -- and only responsibility -- will win again this fall and win the greater challenges for all the nation which lie beyond July, beyond November, beyond January.

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