

Ambassador Livingston Merchant (A)  
to the President (B)

November 28, 1967 8:33p

B Mr. President, Joe Fowler just called and asked me to give a sort of report from the front line.

A The ticker says it is very improbable that they would vote tomorrow.

B It's a bad situation - but here's how it looks. We are meeting informally tomorrow and the meeting has been moved from 3:00p to noon tomorrow. It is still an informal session because they won't formally vote for a President until they know he's available and would accept. The problem is that at this moment, eight out of the twenty directors have not yet gotten authority from their home governments: France, Germany, Belgium, Pakistan, India, Scandinavian countries, the Dutch, and one of the Africans-- Morocco.

A Now, Germany ought to have -- they said they were for it.

B I think most of these are communications problems, but in any event now, we have 70% of the vote. That's on a weighted basis.

A What is ours?

B 25% -- we have a solid majority. Now what we want to do is to arrange it without waste of time - and we have room to have unanimous vote. My feeling is that after meeting tomorrow -- even though some of the eight have not overnight received their authority, I believe we'll be able to have George Woods and two or three directors of the bank to ask Bob if he would accept. If the answer is affirmative then it becomes a formality to have a formal vote, but we would hope to leave the poll open for 24 hours to let them all come in. I am not worried about the ultimate result at all. But I am worried about embarrassment to Bob of continuing holding the line of ~~an~~ inability to make a definitive announcement.

A We have made no comment for two days. I don't know who put it out, but they are debating it on the Senate floor now and it is getting ugly. Kennedy said that he was being asked to go. Bobby Sent him a note. It's on the ticker, so the press are beating us to death. They say he's being forced out, and they are all discussing and politicking and I think it could wind up hurting Bob. They all have him getting out for one of two reasons: he's against the way we are running the war or being fired. He came in

April and said George Woods had talked to him. He said he didn't want to run out on me, but wanted to let me know and wasn't going behind my back. I waited, and later asked him if he still felt that way. So when Fowler came in and asked me if I wanted to make nominations, I said McNamara -- and he told me I had to have three names -- so Nitze -- and True Davis. Then I understood from George Woods that he was willing to carry on until transfer could be made convenient to both of us. But I didn't want to say a word while it is pending, but they are now saying that there has been a great split in the U. S. government, and Hanoi is getting close to home.....so we can leave the thing for whatever time necessary for George Woods , as I understand it.

B I understand -- and I'm sure of 70%.

A Is anybody opposing it openly?

B Nothing definite. There is one opposing country that voted against and you can guess who that is.

A I guess France

B Yes.

A The Germans say that McNamara was a militarist, and the Germans wanted us to know it, and we told them that he might be a professor, but not a militarist. They now say they are strong for him, but wanted to notify us.

B They will be all right. I know your problem, and I know what this delay is doing to Bob, but it is important that we take the time to give them the chance to climb aboard the bandwagon and not force them into the wall. So, we'll leave the polls open.

A Afterward, can you say that you had the votes in?

B I think we can say that tomorrow afternoon.

A Then it's open until the next day and you officially announce the percentage?

B I think we can say this tomorrow afternoon that when we make the approach, Bob will accept.

A           Fowler told me that George was willing to serve up to a year to take care of him. I sure wanted Bob to stay on until we sent our budget up. He told me he was interested in it, and I assume he told George he was interested since he nominated him. I didn't want him to leave, but didn't want him to be here seven years, and have him tell me he's interested in it, and me just ignore him. I think he deserves anything he would like to have. So let's bring as little embarrassment to him and to us as possible -- and let's get those votes -- and when we can say this and announce it, please call me.

B           Yes, I will.