



“Keep the Boys That Should Be Sober, Sober”

Date: 1964-08-07

Conversation: WH6408-10-4795

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Lawrence F. O'Brien Jr.

Start Time: 12:50

Duration: 00:55

Place: Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: On 7 August 1964, after passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, White House legislative liaison Lawrence F. “Larry” O'Brien Jr. summarized the situation on Capitol Hill ahead of a vote on the economic opportunity bill. O'Brien told President Johnson that “if we can just keep the boys that should be sober, sober, and the ones that should be drinking, drinking, that’s our job for the afternoon.”

Lawrence F. “Larry” O'Brien Jr.: Mr. President?

President Johnson: *[talking on speakerphone]* Yes, sir.

O'Brien: Yeah, they're back on the [War on Poverty] bill. They voted the [Tonkin Gulf] resolution 414-0, with Adam [Clayton] Powell [Jr.] [D-New York] voting present.

President Johnson: Well, you're going to have to have, then, 208 people to . . .

O'Brien: Yeah.

President Johnson: Very likely, unless somebody goes out, aren't you?

O'Brien: Right. So . . . but—

President Johnson: Have you got 208 Democrats?

O'Brien: We haven't got 208 Democrats yet, but we're getting damn close to it. We've got 204 solids, a couple almost solids at 206, and we're hovering on that.

President Johnson: You ought to have enough that would save us if they needed to, like [Joe M.] Kilgore [D-Texas] and—

O'Brien: Yeah.

President Johnson: —[Robert R. “Bob”] Casey [D–Texas] and [Omar T.] Burluson [D–Texas], [Walter E.] Rogers [D–Texas]—there’s four.

O’Brien: Mm-hmm. Right.

President Johnson: That’ll give it to you, won’t it?

O’Brien: Yeah. Yeah, I think, now, if we can just keep the boys that should be sober, sober, and the ones that should be drinking, drinking, that’s our job for the afternoon.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: “Lyndon Johnson and Larry O’Brien on 7 August 1964,” Conversation WH6408-10-4795, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Lyndon B. Johnson: Civil Rights, Vietnam, and the War on Poverty, ed. David G. Coleman, Kent B. Germany, Guian A. McKee, and Marc J. Selverstone] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–).

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Full information about this conversation: [“Keep the Boys That Should Be Sober, Sober”](#)