

Hello everybody and welcome to another episode of Archives Uncovered--the podcast that brings to you cool clips from the Presidential Libraries of the U.S. National Archives.

In today's clip from the Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, President Johnson talks with Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 15, 1965. The President discusses his strategies for passing health, education, and welfare legislation as well as his idea for insuring voting rights for African American citizens. This four-minute excerpt from the twenty minute conversation ends with a direct statement from President Johnson, "I just don't see how anybody can say that a man can fight in Vietnam, but he can't vote in the post office."

Now listen to the conversation from the beginning.

MLK: Hello?

LBJ: This Lyndon Johnson. I had a call...

MLK: Who's that?

LBJ: ...from you and I tried to reply to it a couple of times, Savannah, and different places, and they said you were traveling and I got to traveling last night. Just got down here to meet the Prime Minister of Canada this morning and I had a moment, I thought maybe we better try to - I better try to reply to your call.

MLK: Well, I certainly appreciate your returning the call and I don't want to take but up to a minute or so of your time. First, I want to thank you for that great State of the Union message. It was really a marvelous presentation. I think we are on the way now toward the Great Society.

LBJ: I'll tell you what our problem is. We've got to try with every force at our command, and I mean every force, to get these education bills that go to those people under \$2000 a year income. Billion and a half, and this poverty is a billion and a half, and this health that's going to be 900 million next year right at the bottom. We've got to get them passed before the vicious forces that concentrate and give them a coalition that can block them. Then we have got to - so we won't divide them all and get them hung up in a filibuster - we've got to, when we get these big things through that we need: Medicare, Education - I've already got that hearing started the 22nd in the House and the 26th in the Senate - your people ought to be very, very diligent in looking at those committee members that come from urban areas that are friendly to you to see that those bills get reported right out because you have no idea, it's shocking to you how much benefits they will get. There's 8 billion, 500 million this year for education compared to 700 million when I started. So you can imagine - you can imagine what effort that's going to be. This one bill is a billion and a half. Now if we can get that, and we can get a Medicare, we ought to get that by February, then we get our Poverty that will be more than double what it was last year;

then we've got to come up with the qualification of the voters. That will answer 70% of your problems.

MLK: That's right.

LBJ: If you just clear it out everywhere, make it age and read and write. No tests on what Chaucer said, or Browning's poetry or constitutions or memorizing or anything else.

MLK: Yes.

LBJ: And then you may have to put them in the post office [and] let the postmaster, it's a Federal employee that I control, who they can say is local - he's recommended by the Congressman, he's approved by the Senator, but if he doesn't register everybody, I can put a new one in.

MLK: Yes.

LBJ: And it's not an outside Washington influence; it's a local man. But they can just all go to the post office like they buy a stamp. Now, I haven't thought this through, but that's my general feeling. And I've talked to the Attorney General and I've got them working on it. I don't want to start off with that anymore than I do with 14-B because I wouldn't get anything else.

MLK: Yes, yes, yes.

LBJ: Do you - And I don't want to publicize it. But I wanted you to know the outline of what I had in mind.

MLK: Yes, well I remembered you mentioned it to me the other day down at the White House and I have been very diligent about making this statement.

LBJ: Well, your statement was perfect about the vote's important, very important. And I think it's good to talk about that. I just don't see how anybody can say that a man can fight in Vietnam, but he can't vote in the post office.

MLK: Yes, yes.