



















STEPHENS: All right now. Before you were sworn in, I remember that ambassadorial appointments have to have the approval of the Senate.

BENNETT JR: Oh yes, that's provided in the Constitution of the United States.

STEPHENS: As a two-thirds vote?

BENNETT JR: The president appoints and then you have a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the committee approves or disapproves, but if they approve, it goes before the full Senate.

STEPHENS: Yes. You, of course, had contact with our senators at that time, Senator (Herman E.) Talmadge and Senator Russell.

BENNETT JR.: Yes, and before Senator Talmadge, Senator (Walter F.) George, who of course was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee for a good many years.

STEPHENS: That's right. During the earlier period of your career as, in the Foreign Service, I believe you told me you started in the Foreign Service about 1940?

BENNETT JR: 1941, yes.

STEPHENS: 1941, at the--being at the University and then being as an exchange student to Germany.

BENNETT JR: Yeah, I followed you to Germany, you remember.

STEPHENS: Yeah, that's right.

BENNETT JR: And then came back and I was in Washington as an intern, sort of an apprentice, a special program of the Rockefeller Foundation, from 1939 through 1940.

STEPHENS: Did you talk with Senator Russell about the appointment after the nomination?

BENNETT JR: Well, I always made it my practice--now the foreign service, you know, is a career service and it's always been rather rigorously independent, that's how--it's not always understood on Capitol Hill, but in the foreign service, we feel that we serve the government and serve the country, and for instance, my original service began with President Franklin Roosevelt, and so I have now served eight presidents and I have autographed pictures of all eight on my piano in Brussels today.

STEPHENS: Well, that's great.

BENNETT JR: But I always, since I was a Georgian man, I made it my business to know our people and you know, this was the kind of state where you knew your congressmen and your

senators and so I usually would go up when I was at home and pay calls on all our representatives--

STEPHENS: Of course, you had a family background connection with Senator Russell that made it--

BENNETT JR: Particularly close with Senator Russell--

STEPHENS: Just as a family friendship among the other responsibilities you felt to your senators.

BENNETT JR: I always went by to see him and it was more family talk than anything else, but I remember his telling me, this was at the beginning of the Nixon administration when he was then the, you know, the ranking U.S senator and number one in the Senate and--

STEPHENS: Yes.

BENNETT JR: President *pro tem*, I guess it's called, isn't it?

STEPHENS: Yes.

BENNETT JR: And he said--I came home that January, I was there, I think I was the last ambassador to see Lyndon Johnson before he left office, because it was on the 19th of January, I happened to be at home and I was at Mr. Rusk's farewell ceremony.

STEPHENS: What year was this now?

BENNETT JR: I was then, this was 1969, January of 1969, and I was ambassador to Portugal at the time, but I happened to be at home and so I stayed over so's to go to Mr. Rusk's farewell. And I went up to see Senator Russell and he said, "Now we got a change of administration, Tap, is there anything I can do for you? Can I be helpful to you?" And I said, "Senator, I appreciate your support, but I'm not asking for your help." Well, I thought that was independent foreign service; I later came to conclude that it was a very impertinent remark to make--for being an obscure foreign service officer, ambassador, to make to the ranking member of the United States Senate, but he took it in good stride, and he said, "Because the new secretary of state said he'll need my help on things and so I'd like to know." Well, I didn't ask for anything and it all turned out all right, but he was always very understanding and I remember his saying that day, he said, "You know, I don't know too much about the state department, said, "I've specialized on defense matters." He was then chairman of the Armed Services Committee--

STEPHENS: Yes.

BENNETT JR: Or had given it up to be chairman of Appropriations. I, you know, he was so prominent he was in all of the major committees. But he said, "I've put my career and my interests in the defense department, rather than in the State " So I suspect he'd be interested to know today that now I'm serving as ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

STEPHENS: Yeah, which is--

BENNETT JR: Which has a lot to do with the military side of the government.

STEPHENS: Well, I'm sure that Senator Russell must have had a great deal to do with the creation of NATO--

BENNETT JR: Oh, indeed, and he was--

STEPHENS: Because of his position as the head of Armed Services.

BENNETT JR: And gave it very strong support always, of course.

STEPHENS: Yes. I remember he always visited when the recess period came, he went to Spain to visit there, to see our bases there and other places.

BENNETT JR: See I flew with him once when he was in the Caribbean and he stopped that time in the Bahamas to see some of our navy's underwater work there--

STEPHENS: Yes.

BENNETT JR: There was a special station down there. No, as you say, he was an indefatigable man to look after the interest of the armed services and to make sure they were doing their job right.

STEPHENS: And he made personal inspections, rather than sending somebody else,

BENNETT JR: You're right!

STEPHENS: which I always have thought was what a Senate, a chairman of a committee should do.

BENNETT JR: Yes.

STEPHENS: Now let me ask you one question. You and I were talking about it the other day. When you were the ambassador for the United States down in the Dominican Republic, they had an uprising of some sort there. Tell me about that and your consequential discussion with Senator Russell.

BENNETT JR: Yes. Well, we had a lot of shooting there, as you know, there was --

STEPHENS: Well, I always heard that you had a communication with the, with President Johnson and it makes a good story and I, about the fact that he wanted to know if it was any emergency. You said, "Yes, I'm in the embassy now and under the desk--

BENNETT JR: "I'm talking to you from under my desk."

STEPHENS: From under my desk, they're shooting through the embassy." I like that uh, because it really proves it was an emergency.

BENNETT JR: Well, it was just about that time I was on the phone and a plane suddenly dived on the embassy so I took cover as the marines taught me to do.

STEPHENS: Well, tell me about the, after you had--

BENNETT JR: Wells that--

BENNETT SR: Well now let me say one word that you said when President Johnson asked you about an emergency. You said, "If you don't believe it's an emergency, listen to that glass fall."

BENNETT JR: Well, that's true, but as I said, you could hear the bullets; you could hear the shooting over the telephone which was true. Well, I had been there about a year and it was a country which was in serious difficulties. They'd had a 31-year dictatorship, you know, which had ended with assassination and sugar prices had dropped to practically nothing. You can't believe it today, but in the winter of 1964-1965 between Christmas and New Year's, sugar dropped below three cents a pound. We knew, since their means of income was so circumscribed, that we'd have real trouble in the near future and within three months we did have this really very violent revolution and shooting in the streets. Well, it was an enormous loss of life for such a small country.

STEPHENS: Was that when you recommended that we, they have Marines come there?

BENNETT JR: Yes, that was April the 28th of, I believe, 1965. And we brought the Marines in to save American and Allied lives because the evacuation program, which was enormous for that size country, carried out 4600 people. No, I'm sorry, there were 46 countries involved and there were about 5000 people taken out, less than half of whom were Americans, without a single, without the loss of a single life. Well, the action became controversial, of course, and we had a lot of criticism from some of the Eastern press. I'm glad to say the Georgia papers always understood what the issues were and it was a very determined effort by a left-wing social visionary to take over the government but behind him were very disciplined Communist cadres of people who knew what they were after.

STEPHENS: And this was after the taking over of Cuba by the Communists and they were anxious to take over all the Caribbean and Latin American--

BENNETT JR: Yes, you remember, Castro took over as a social reformer and then less than a year later revealed himself as a card-carrying Communist and this was what was about to be happening in the Dominican Republic. Well, President Johnson, and in this he had the full support of Senator Russell, was determined that we were not going to have another Cuba in the Caribbean and that had been President Kennedy's policy before Johnson. And so when the shooting started, we recognized what the issues were, and of course, it was unfortunate that some

of the liberal elements in this country and, particularly in academic and press fraternities, couldn't see that and thought we were moving against a social reform, which was not the case at all. In fact, as a result of the action and the fact that we helped a country back on the road to civilian and constitutional government, they've had a longer period of it than that country's ever had. It was the country, you remember, where Columbus first landed, so it has the longest history in this hemisphere, but they've never had more than five years of constitutional government in all those more than, more than four hundred years.

STEPHENS: Was it at San Domingo--

BENNETT JR: Santa Domingo.

STEPHENS: That Columbus landed.

BENNETT JR: He landed actually on the north coast--

STEPHENS: On the north coast

BENNETT JR: on his first voyage and there's a marker up there and that was the original colony that was founded. His brother was governor there and.

STEPHENS: And he was supposed to have been buried there--

BENNETT JR: --his remains are in the cathedral there.

STEPHENS: There.

BENNETT JR: Seville and Havana dispute that. They claim they have his bones, but I'm convinced that they're in Santa Domingo. Well, what I wanted to say about Senator Russell was he took a very active interest in this situation. You remember, he had been very critical of our failure to follow through in Cuba and rid ourselves of--

STEPHENS: After the Bay of Pigs.

BENNETT JR: Yes, he said we should have put more force if we were going to do it at all and remove that, remove that cancer from the hemisphere. I think he was right myself. Well--

STEPHENS: Well, I agree with you and I had an opportunity about that time to talk with General Lemnitzer, General [Lyman L.] Lemnitzer, who was the head of the Chiefs of Staff.

BENNETT JR: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff--

STEPHENS: That's right and he told me and my friend John Bell from Augusta who'd served with me--

BENNETT JR: Oh yes.

STEPHENS: He said that Cuba is not a military problem, said it's a political problem.

BENNETT JR: Right.

STEPHENS: And I'm sure that that's the way you felt.

BENNETT JR: And it remains one today.

STEPHENS: You felt that was true in the Dominican Republic--

BENNETT JR: Yes.

STEPHENS: --as far as the situation was concerned.

BENNETT JR: Well, you see the chain of islands there. There's Cuba, which is only ninety miles from Key West, the largest. Then the next in size is Hispaniola, with the Dominican Republic being two-thirds of that island, and then there's Puerto Rico, where, of course, we have very great interests. And so to let the second one go to the Communist sphere would have put Puerto Rico in grave danger. At any rate, we took the action. It was successful and after most tortuous and complicated negotiations, the thing was composed--, a provisional government was put in office, and then they had a free election a few months later and they've been going along very well ever since. And the little man, which all this is supposed to be about, has had a better shake and a better prospect for his own future than at any time in Dominican history. But, none of this pleased Senator Fulbright, who at that time was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and this is the story with Senator Russell. Because this happened--

STEPHENS: Senator Fulbright, and some of people like him, made a criticism of what had happened down there and sort of blamed you for some--

BENNETT JR: Very strong criticism and, but this is what happened. Senator Fulbright took the floor of the Senate, I believe it was in early September, and had a very strong speech condemning everything that had happened; condemning Johnson for sending Marines and then condemning me for having recommended it; that I didn't know the job and was, you know, just not doing what I should have been doing.

STEPHENS: And this was, as we would say again, your first assignment as an ambassador and it was important--

BENNETT JR: As an ambassador, yes I was minister in Greece and I served in--

STEPHENS: Yeah, I remember.

BENNETT JR: --other European Latin Countries. Well, I remember Senator Russell saying to me that, he said, "I am furious at Bill Fulbright." Said, "he saw me a few days ago and he said, I am going to get upon the Floor and attack the Dominican case and the handling of it by the

Johnson administration," but said, "You needn't worry, I'm not going to jump on your man Bennett." Because Senator Russell apparently had already made clear his support of my action. "Well," he said, "I was not even on the Floor when Fulbright spoke." Said, "When the word was brought to me in my office that he had attacked you as the ambassador," said, "It made me furious in view of what he said to me a few days before and I immediately determined that I was going to answer it." And about three days later, Senator Russell did get up and make a very powerful speech endorsing what we'd done and then, to my eternal appreciation of him, he gave a very strong endorsement of me personally and that's the time--

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In this speech, he referred to the fact that the Russell's and the Bennett's had been friends for several generations and he said, "Why just recently I was over at the ambassador's father's house to dinner with friends," and said, "I want to tell the Senate of the United States that these are people who are grounded in firm principles and they're not people who panic," and that the ambassador is not, was not just acting out of impulse, that he knew what he was doing. And I always was very grateful to him for that support.

BENNETT SR: Me, too.

STEPHENS: Well I'm sure that you are reflecting what so many people found out and so many people appreciated and that is if you were right, Senator Russell was going to back you up and back you up effectively. And he knew what you had done was correct and it was one of his characteristics. I found that out very much myself as being on the House side when he was in the Senate, and I'm sure that reflects that one great characteristic that we all appreciated. He didn't run and abandon his friends when they seemed to be in difficulty. He was one of those who would come in and help fight for you.

BENNETT JR: He was extremely loyal and in fact he even made a trip that fall down to the Dominican Republic just to--

STEPHENS: Tell me about that.

BENNETT JR: Yes, he came down.

STEPHENS: He came down specifically to see you.

BENNETT JR: He came down and stayed at my house, but he came to look into the situation. He visited the troops and I remember we had the, this was in November and we had the Armistice Day ceremony on the steps of the embassy and he spoke at that little occasion which was out under the tropic sun, you know, and it was a very nice ceremony and he gave it great dignity with his contribution to it. But at the time, I already knew that I was slated to move *on* to another post and I did go in a few months--

STEPHENS: You went to Portugal after you left the Dominican Republic.

BENNETT JR: And the White House had already been in touch with me as to whether I was to go to Sweden or to Portugal. Either one was a promotion, as far as I was concerned and then it was decided that it would be Portugal and that was a great satisfaction to my wife, who didn't want to have a cold climate. So, Portugal's not as cold as Sweden. So anyway, the Senator came down and I remember he was sitting on my back terrace one morning there and he was in the rocking chair. We had old-fashioned rocking chairs as you do in the tropics, and as you know we used to have on porches here more than we do now.

STEPHENS: Yeah.

BENNETT JR: And he said, said, "Tap, they tell me that, Lyndon Johnson tells me that he's gonna send you as ambassador over to Europe." And I said, "That's what I understand, Senator, and it'll be fine with me." He said, "Well, I just want to know, do you want to go? If you don't want to go, you don't have to go." Well, at that time, I was looking forward to getting out of this tropical hell-hole--

STEPHENS: Yeah.

BENNETT JR: --to use the word mildly, and so I said, "No, I think the time has come for me to leave here because I've done my part of the job and we need to have an election here in a few months." I stayed until the eve of the election and then it's time for me to move on and I'm looking forward to another assignment. But I again always appreciated that because he was already determined that, if necessary, he would intervene to see that I was done no injustice. And since, now papers like the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, which so attacked the operation--later on the *Washington Post* at least had the gumption to turn around and say we now recognize what was done was correct. I don't think the *New York Times* ever changed.

STEPHENS: Well, the thing about the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* that a lot of people don't realize, people don't read them much in Georgia.

BENNETT JR: Nor in the Congress either.

STEPHENS: And in the Congress either, except those who are very close by and whose Congressional districts are affected by the publicity. But I appreciate your--

BENNETT JR: Both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* fired the two reporters who'd been their reporting people--

STEPHENS: Because they had not done their job right.

BENNETT JR: They had just done a very thoroughly unobjective job of work.

STEPHENS: Well, that's very interesting, but I--

BENNETT JR: And then that was the time that I flew up with Senator Russell when we stopped in the Bahamas and he visited the navy installation there.

STEPHENS: Yes. Well I had an experience with Senator Russell that is analogous to show you the same kind of support that he would give you. That, he was in a position to work well with the development of Fort Gordon as the chairman of the Armed Services Committee in the Senate. And a big project was pending but nobody knew whether it would be financed and approved and Senator Russell, as the ranking member of the Appropriations Committee and also the chairman of the Armed Forces Committee, knew when the matters were going to be done before anybody else, because he would make these plans. And he called me up on the telephone and he, knowing that it was, that Augusta and Fort Gordon were in my congressional district. And he said, we are going to approve a big project at Fort Gordon on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and said, "I'm going to send out a news release," and he said, "I'm going to send it out, if it's all right with you, saying that you and I jointly announce this." Well, golly, you don't know how much I appreciated that because I had no way of--

BENNETT SR: Yeah. Well, that's why he came to be a great senator.

STEPHENS: That's correct.

BENNETT JR: Well, he was a very human person.

STEPHENS: Well, he did.

BENNETT JR: Now the reason that I flew with him that time, now this was November, 1965, while he was there staying at our house, the embassy residence, I had word that my mother, who was seriously ill and who did pass away later that month, her condition had taken a turn for the worse. And he said, "Well, the thing for you to do is to fly with me so's you can get home fast." And we left the next morning and he got off in the Bahamas but sent me on over to Miami in his own plane so that I could get a commercial flight home. And that was again evidence of his humanity.

STEPHENS: Well, he just never got to be too big a big shot to be a man and recognize his friends and to look after them. And I think that quality stands out in everything he did.

BENNETT JR: I never saw him when he wasn't entirely calm and judicious in his comments on things.

STEPHENS: Yes.

BENNETT JR: He wasn't one to fly off the handle or to make flamboyant statements.

STEPHENS: Well, when he was governor, wasn't he, Mr. Bennett, one of our youngest governors?

BENNETT SR: He was the youngest governor.

STEPHENS: Was he the youngest?

BENNETT SR: Yeah.

STEPHENS: That we ever had at that time.

BENNETT SR: Yeah, that's right.

STEPHENS: I think--

BENNETT JR: You remember his statement to Teddy [Edward M.] Kennedy, don't you? Did you ever hear that?

STEPHENS: NO, I don't remember that.

BENNETT JR: Well you see, Kennedy visited me in Greece when he was not yet thirty, this was back in 1962, I guess, and he--

STEPHENS: He just had become a senator.

BENNETT JR: Well no, he was just about to announce--

STEPHENS: Announce, that's right.

BENNETT JR: He wasn't even thirty yet, but he announced on his thirtieth birthday. But he was making the required trips for a Massachusetts politician to Israel, to Greece and to Italy. So I was in charge of the embassy in Greece at the time, and had a very interesting two or three days with him. Well, later when he was--(At this point, Stephens must have re-recorded over this part of Mr. Bennett's statement. The transcript follows exactly as he recorded it.)

STEPHENS: This oral history interview has taken place here in Athens, Georgia on October the thirtieth, nineteen hundred and seventy-seven. I believe I better correct that, today's the twenty-ninth, Saturday the twenty-ninth and not the thirtieth.

BENNETT JR: --of a Senator from my state. Well, Senator Russell looked at him and in a slow, calm way said, "But you forget I had already served two terms as governor before I was elected to the senate."

STEPHENS: Well, wasn't there another story that you told me about his talking with Teddy Kennedy and Teddy Kennedy had told him that his older brother, who was then the president, had given him some advice about advising Senator Russell whenever he needed anything done on the Floor?

BENNETT JR: Yes.

STEPHENS: Did you tell me that? Had you heard that?

BENNETT JR: No, I think that didn't come from me, but I'm not at all surprised.

STEPHENS: I was thinking you had discussed that, but--

BENNETT JR: Because President [John F.] Kennedy had served with and under Dick Russell as a younger senator.

STEPHENS: Yes. Well at the Miami convention, I believe, when [Estes] Kefauver was nominated, as the vice-presidential candidate--

BENNETT JR: Right.

STEPHENS: And the presidential candidate was Adlai Stevenson. Again that was when Senator Russell was prominently nom--

BENNETT JR: Mentioned himself.

STEPHENS: Mentioned as a candidate.

BENNETT JR: Yes. And then the big competition was once Adlai Stevenson had been nominated was between Kefauver and Jack Kennedy as vice-president.

STEPHENS: And Jack Kennedy and Senator Russell, in my recollection, and I know we in Georgia felt that Kennedy would be the preference on that ticket, and I believe that if that had been a ticket, that it would have been the stronger ticket, but if Senator Russell had been on the ticket, it would have been great.

BENNETT JR: Stronger still. Because that was during the years when you were losing southern states.

STEPHENS: Yes, exactly, and dissident factions breaking off and I, like many people said, that we were not going ever to elect another president as a Democrat until we brought the South substantially back into the Democratic party. And that's what happened this last time with Jimmy Carter.

BENNETT JR: That's why Carter won.

STEPHENS: He won because he carried practically every one of the old Confederate states.

BENNETT JR: I think Virginia's the only one he didn't carry.

STEPHENS: The only one he didn't carry, yes. Well I know that you're busy as our representative in Brussels at NATO. It's an important job and thank you very much, you and

your father, for talking with us on this and I'm sure it's going to make an important contribution to the Russell Library.

*Richard B. Powell*  
Library for Political Research and Studies