“Finest Advertisement He Could Give Me”

Date: 1964-01-08  
Conversation: WH6401-10-1278  
Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson  
Participant: Thomas G. Corcoran  
Start Time: 19:45  
Duration: 01:07  
Place: Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: Throughout the 1964 presidential contest, President Johnson ran far ahead of the Republican nominee, Sen. Barry M. Goldwater Sr. [R–Arizona]. In this call from early that year, Johnson and Democratic strategist Tommy G. “Tommy the Cork” Corcoran lampooned Goldwater’s campaign stumbles.

President Johnson: But what do you think about [Barry M.] Goldwater [Sr.] [R–Arizona]? How do I answer him when he said I out-Roosevelt Roosevelt? I think that’s about the finest advertisement he could give me, isn’t it?

Thomas G. “Tommy the Cork” Corcoran: [Unclear.] You could say that’s—

President Johnson: Huh?

Corcoran: —the nicest tribute you could have. [President Johnson chuckles.] I mean, that’s wonderful.

President Johnson: He said, “He out-Roosevelted Roosevelt, he out-Kennedyed Kennedy, and he made Truman look like a piker."

Corcoran: [laughing] Well, that’s wonderful.

President Johnson: Well, how do you think I ought to answer? [Laughs.]


I also wanted to tell you something else that was amusing. You know, I laughed at him one night, when . . . many months ago, I laughed at him one night when he said he was going to run for president. I said, “I hope you’re going to be wise enough to do what Lyndon did and run for the Senate at the same time.” And he said, “I can’t, goddamn it. I criticized him at the time! But,” he said, [President Johnson laughs] “he was right.” And now, Jesus Christ, two days ago he comes out and does the same thing. [Chuckles.]
Lyndon, I really—I was thrilled by—

**President Johnson:** I thought I might say, “Well, I’m sorry my student is not following teacher anymore, just one day.”

**Corcoran:** [Laughs.] That’s right. That’d be good.

**President Johnson:** [Chuckles.]

*End of excerpt.*