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I S S U E S A N D A N S W E R S

SUNDAY, JUNE 15, 1969

GUEST:

SENATOR EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN (R. Ill.)

INTERVIEWED BY:

Sam Donaldson - ABC News Correspondent

Bill Lawrence - ABC National Affairs Editor

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MR. LAWRENCE: Senator Dirksen, about 15 months ago candidate Nixon on the New Hampshire Primary campaign trail said that he could end the war in Vietnam and win the peace in Asia. Has President Nixon ever indicated to you how or when?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: No, Bill, as a matter of fact, he has not. That is, in any specific detail. But he had a general format that somehow -- first of all, you had to make progress at the Paris negotiations, and in the second place, you had to have an understanding with the leaders in Vietnam, meaning

1 South Vietnam.

2 Now, in pursuing that, he has Lodge over in Paris at the
3 present time, and while that has been going rather slowly,
4 I think some progress has been made.

5 In addition, of course, his meeting with President Thieu
6 in Midway Island added up, I believe, to some real progress
7 because he discovered that Thieu was quite flexible for one
8 thing, he was knowledgeable, he understood pretty well what
9 had to be done, and those factors taken together with the kind
10 of counsel that he got from General Abrams, was enough to
11 suggest that perhaps we could for the first time start bringing
12 live bodies back in the number of 25,000 and to do it as
13 quickly as possible.

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1 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, towards the end, though not at the
 2 beginning of the Korean war, the Republicans used to call that
 3 Truman's war. Now, I noticed the other day that the New York
 4 Times called this one "Nixon's war." Is that fair?

5 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, are they ever fair under these
 6 circumstances? I suppose I denominated the Korean struggle as
 7 Truman's war. But I point out this essential difference: You
 8 forget that Truman ordered the troops in, as I recall, on
 9 a Sunday afternoon. He conferred with no one. He took
 10 advantage of a little gap in the United States operation and
 11 ordered the troops to Korea, and titled it a police action.

12 Now this is a different undertaking. Behind this you have
 13 got three Administrations. The Administration of President
 14 Kennedy, that of President Johnson, and before that, President
 15 Eisenhower. and now you have President Nixon. So this is an
 16 inherited position, this is a legacy that he has gotten from
 17 his forebears, so to speak, and he is undertaking to do the best
 18 he can with a rather solid problem.

19 MR. DONALDSON: Senator Dirksen, 25,000 men to be withdrawn
 20 shortly, and many hints that that will be followed by another
 21 25,000 and perhaps even more increments within a nine to 12
 22 months' period. Do you think that the South Vietnamese Army
 23 is ready to fill this gap or are we really just trying to buy
 24 time for the Nixon Administration?

25 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, first of all I think I can respond

1 directly by saying that I do believe that they are ready to
2 fill that gap. I think in talking about pulling out troops, I'd
3 rather think in terms of replacements by the Southvietnamese.
4 One of the problems we had out there was to make sure that a
5 larger number was being equipped with the M-16 rifle. That
6 was a rather slow process. But that was one of those morale
7 builders that really built up and exhilarated these South Viet-
8 namese troops. So all signs being equal, I think they will be
9 equal to the situation and to the challenge.

10 MR. DONALDSON: There is also a hope explicit in the
11 troop withdrawal that North Vietnam might match it, might also
12 deescalate by withdrawing some of her own troops. Do you think
13 that is a real possibility?

14 SENATOR DIRKSEN: It is hard to tell. On the basis of
15 their expressions thus far, one might not believe so, but I
16 think there are certain factors in the picture that add up
17 substantially to the hope that perhaps it could happen.

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1 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, during the Korean War again you
2 and other Republicans were quite free in your criticism of the
3 way the war was being conducted. Why are you so extraordinar-
4 ily sensitive now when Senator Kennedy suggests that maybe
5 Mr. Nixon isn't running this war right?

6 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Bill, I don't believe I can recall that
7 anybody on our side of the political fence ever cast any
8 aspersions whatsoever on our military command in Korea. But
9 you see, the statement that the Senator made was a direct
10 affront, I thought, and a direct reflection upon our ablest
11 commanders in Vietnam.

12 Now, who will deny that General Creighton Abrams is one of
13 our very finest commanders and a man who studied in the
14 military art?

15 Now, when you talk an operation and say it was senseless
16 and irresponsible, well, whoever ordered that operation was
17 then senseless and irresponsible in doing it, and that, of
18 course, had to be taken at face value and some response had
19 to be made.

20 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, I didn't mean to suggest that
21 you ever criticized General MacArthur. Far from it. What I
22 was talking about was your criticism of Mr. Truman. I remember
23 the criticisms of the Republicans that you wouldn't bomb beyond
24 the Yalu, the privileged-sanctuary theory, the terrible
25 casualties you were taking at Heartbreak Hill, which I suppose

1 is just another name for Hamburger Hill in another
2 piece of real estate in the Far East. We didn't hold
3 Heartbreak Hill either. We gave it back in the settlement.

4 Didn't you make those criticisms?

5 SENATOR DIRKSEN: I made my share of criticisms at that
6 time, but I was very careful not to reflect upon the capacity
7 of those who were leading the troops.

8 Now, the Commander-in-Chief is a different thing. He
9 is not a military man --

10 MR. LAWRENCE: He is fair game?

11 SENATOR DIRKSEN: He is fair game in the sense that he
12 is President of the United States and he is a policy-maker.

13 MR. LAWRENCE: And he is another politician.

14 SENATOR DIRKSEN: He is the Commander-in-Chief but he is
15 not an officer in the field and that sets him apart.

16 MR. DONALDSON: But Senator, we have a fundamental
17 question here of how to fight this war when we are engaged
18 in negotiations. Let's look at the search and destroy
19 operations and the operations like the one on Ap Bia
20 Mountain, Hamburger Hill. There are many people, including
21 Ambassador Governor Harriman, who believe we have to de-
22 escalate the fighting; we have to de-escalate the engagement.
23 Do you approve of continued military operations that throw
24 American units against the enemy in these fierce assaults when
25 then they give up the territory?

1 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Sam, I could make you a kind of a
2 mixed answer but I don't think I shall, and for a very good
3 reason. I am not over there. I can't tell, 12,000 miles away,
4 what the situation dictates, what they should do at a given
5 instance, and how should they do it. That is a military de-
6 cision that has to be made and if I were to make it, I think I
7 would lay myself open to the charge that I am trying to run the
8 war just like this Committee on Conduct of the War, that we
9 had when Lincoln was the President.

10 MR. DONALDSON: Well, are you saying Senator Kennedy
11 is disloyal then? You almost --

12 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, no, not for a moment have I ever
13 ventured in that field. I tried to be temperate as I could.
14 I insisted that what I said didn't dislocate my affection for
15 him, but I did believe that it was an unwarranted affront to
16 the judgment of our military commanders over there without
17 knowing, without having been there, or being there, and under-
18 standing very fully.

19 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, I think it is fair to say that the
20 American people have an attitude that they want to give Mr.
21 Nixon plenty of time to settle this war by negotiation, but
22 they do want it settled.

23 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Yes.

24 MR. LAWRENCE: How much time does he really have before
25 he has to show some real progress?

1 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well now, we have made this much
2 progress at least: The first contingent coming home in a
3 month or two. Now, behind that there ought to be some action.
4 How long would it take? Well, of course, you are dealing with
5 difficult people, with an oriental caste of mind. My own
6 belief is that probably, after this first contingent comes
7 home, you will have a four or five months period when nothing
8 actually developed, but then something can very suddenly
9 develop.

10 MR. LAWRENCE: Politically you better settle this before
11 the '70 elections though, hadn't you?

12 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, this is a considerable distance
13 in the future.

14 MR. LAWRENCE: I know, but isn't it true --

15 SENATOR DIRKSEN: But a lot of progress ought to be made
16 not only -- well, not in fiscal '69 because that ends up on
17 June 30th, but in calendar '69 there ought to be reasonable
18 progress.

19 MR. DONALDSON: But what about Bill's question, if you
20 don't settle it by the '70 elections, are you going to fail
21 in an effort to win seats? Are you going to lose seats?

22 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, obviously it is going to have an
23 impact on the electorate in this country. We have been at
24 this now a long time. I have said time and again we have
25 been there just too long, and the longer it goes, the unhappier

1 our people become, and, of course, the way they register
2 unhappiness is on election day.

3 (Announcements)

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5 MR. DONALDSON: The big vote coming up in the Senate
6 is on the ABM Safeguard Missile System. Do you think that the
7 President can win that vote without a further compromise?

8 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, Sam, is there a compromise?
9 They indicate, of course, that if you re-label it and call
10 it "Research and Development," that that might make it
11 easier and more palatable to swallow, but that is not a com-
12 promise. That is just changing the label on the can.

13 MR. DONALDSON: But you are not deploying then?

14 SENATOR DIRKSEN: I know, but for myself I just don't
15 want to go down that alley. This is a very serious business.
16 And, insofar as I know -- and obviously I can't put words in
17 the mouth of the President -- but insofar as I know, there is
18 no compromise. It's got to be a deployable ABM and if we
19 can't get that your hands are tied.

20 MR. DONALDSON: Are you saying then that you would not
21 at this time entertain any compromise? You are known to be
22 very flexible when a big issue is important and you think it
23 needs to be gotten through the Senate.

24 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, Sam, I think you ought to ex-
25 press that another way. I become flexible upon occasions when

1 I think I have to.

2 MR. DONALDSON: Do you have to now?

3 SENATOR DIRKSEN: I don't believe so.

4 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, does it help you any when Mr.
5 Nixon's Safeguard moved the missiles out to the missile
6 sites and took them out of those well-manicured Republican
7 suburbs around Chicago like Libertyville where Sentinel would
8 have been located?

9 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, it didn't make me feel different
10 one way or the other about it. When you are thinking in terms
11 of national defense, you are thinking of the fifty states.
12 You are thinking of the whole country and if per chance military
13 requirements dictate that they ought to put one out there, then
14 who am I to quarrel with the decision of the experts in this
15 field?

16 MR. DONALDSON: Well, if there is no compromise, when then
17 will the Senate vote and what will the vote be?

18 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Who knows? If an amendment were offered
19 this week to the Second Supplemental Appropriation Bill, you
20 might at least get a test vote.

21 MR. DONALDSON: Are you planning to do that?

22 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I am not planning to do it be-
23 cause I am very much for the ABM. I have said to my people,
24 "Until you can come along with more persuasive evidence than
25 I have seen, certainly I am going to support the ABM Safeguard

1 missile." Now, they haven't done so and I have tried to
2 follow this rather thoroughly.

3 MR. DONALDSON: You do think you will win?

4 SENATOR DIRKSEN: I do.

5 MR. DONALDSON: What if you win by just two or three or
6 four votes? Might you lose in the long run as far as the
7 administration program in the Senate is concerned?

8 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, Sam, isn't it like winning a
9 football game with a kick after points? That is the way it is
10 in the Congress. You win and that's what counts.

11 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, I want to change the subject.
12 We have recently been through a rather searing experience
13 of ethical conduct by at least one, perhaps two
14 justices of the United States Supreme Court. We all know
15 there have been breaches of conflict of interest within the
16 Senate and within the House from time to time. How would you
17 feel about a government-wide code of ethics that required dis-
18 closure of all sources of outside income?

19 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, Bill, now that you are so
20 generous, why limit it to that? Why not include all the
21 federal taxpayers in the United States?

22 MR. LAWRENCE: Well, I think the federal taxpayers do
23 in their --

24 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, it is not disclosed.

25 MR. LAWRENCE: That is true, but we elect these people.

1 We expect them to be above conflict of interest. They are
2 selected representatives of ours. We have a right to expect
3 certain standards of them, do we not?

4 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Bill, tell me how long you have been
5 in the newspaper business.

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1 MR. LAWRENCE: Let's say I have been in Washington 31 years
2 and a bit longer than that in the --

3 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Then you have a pretty fair idea of what
4 a tremendous opinion maker a newspaper really is. In proportion
5 that it influences public opinion, obviously I think they ought
6 to have an accounting of their stewardship. How about your
7 publishers? Why not have them nail up their income taxes
8 on the frontdoor? It is a contention I have made all along.
9 Why just single out those who have been elected to public
10 office? If you are trying to establish a conflict of
11 interest, well if there is a conflict of interest, that
12 is pretty easy to establish.

13 MR. DONALDSON: You know the argument is always that
14 Congress requires of the Executive, and now because of the
15 publicity, the Judiciary Branches of government a strict
16 accounting, a Caesar's wife attitude, but Congress does
17 not require this of itself. Why not? What is the
18 difference?

19 SENATOR DIRKSEN: The difference is simply this: Those
20 who are confirmed to high spots in the Executive Branch or
21 to the Federal bench have to be approved and passed on by
22 the United States Senate, if it is a confirmable spot. So before
23 you confirm, you just ask the necessary questions, you find
24 out what is the background, find out what is in the portfolio,
25 if there is, and that makes quite a difference.

1 MR. LAWRENCE: Well, considering what we already know
2 about Mr. Justice Douglas and his former association with a
3 foundation, do you think he should resign?

4 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Now look, Judges are appointed and
5 the people in high policy spots in the executive branch are
6 appointed. Members of the House and Senate are elected. They
7 have to go before the electorate as provided by the Constitu-
8 tion. I have been there eight times when I was in the House,
9 and eight times primary and general election since I have been
10 in the Senate. Now, if anybody wants to take me apart, all he
11 has to do is get down there in the audience and say, "Wait a
12 minute," and then ask me a question and demand an answer.

13 MR. DONALDSON: Someone took you apart in a sense in a
14 national magazine, Newsweek, this past --

15 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, he didn't take me apart.

16 MR. DONALDSON: I have to give you a chance to answer it.
17 It was the long article talking about your law firm ties and
18 work in other areas, and the article says "There is the other
19 Dirksen, the one who is not lovable, and this one is a dark and
20 even malevolent figure." How do you respond to that?

21 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, Bill, you must remember the days
22 of the muck rake in journalism, or do you?

23 MR. LAWRENCE: Yes, sir.

24 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Sure you do. A managing editor for a
25 periodical or a newspaper calls in his favorite hatchetman and
says, "Go out to Pekin, Illinois, and take a gander at Senator

1 Dirksen and get the dirt on him, and then go up to Peoria and
2 brouse around that law firm and see what you can get out of them."

3 I have been a member of that law firm so long I can hardly
4 remember when it was -- I am just "of counsel" and have my
5 name on the door. He found nothing there.

6 MR. LAWRENCE: Do you practice any law, Senator?

7 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Certainly I don't practice law. If I
8 find something, if somebody writes me, wants to have reference
9 to a lawyer, if I can do it, and it is non-federal, I do it.
10 But let me add the rest of it. They went to Chicago and
11 talked to the Democratic politicians, including my opponent
12 in 1968. They came up with nothing. They went over to see
13 the Household Finance Corporation on the Illinois corporation
14 incident. Why? Because I made a speech at their convention.
15 They operate in Canada and this country, and they paid me a
16 rather fancy honorarium. So surely my law firm must represent
17 them. Not my law firm, what was once my law firm.

18 MR. DONALDSON: Why wouldn't it be your law firm if you
19 still bring them business from time to time and you still
20 receive remuneration? You do still receive some remuneration,
21 do you not?

22 SENATOR DIRKSEN: If I bring some non-federal law
23 business. But now to show you how it works, a law firm in
24 California has a claim against somebody who lives in Peoria.
25 Well, now they don't know a law firm in Peoria except to look in

1 a directory. They ask their Senator, and he calls me and
2 says "Do you know some law firm in Peoria that would represent
3 these people?"

4 Well, I said "Certainly there is a firm there. Once upon
5 a time I was a partner of the firm." Why shouldn't I
6 make that reference? I'd like to know. And if they want
7 to remunerate me for it, why not? Where is the conflict of
8 interest?

9 MR. DONALDSON: How much do you make from your law
10 firm?

11 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, now that is a nice question,
12 isn't it.

13 MR. DONALDSON: You have never answered it before.

14 SENATOR DIRKSEN: I certainly haven't, and I don't intend
15 to. But now let me finish this story. They went down to Florida
16 because Mrs. Dirksen built a little house down there. They got
17 an awfully bad picture of the house. They didn't even bother
18 to inquire what the mortgage was, and they got nothing out of the
19 neighbors, so that was a water haul. Then he came back to
20 Washington and talked about the Federal Power Commission and about
21 these other things, about the Department of Labor. Well isn't
22 it rather strange, Sam, that a fellow could have been here 35
23 years-plus, in the House 15 years, in the Senate going on 19
24 years, and have fooled people here all this time? You tell me,
25 Sam.

(Announcements)

1 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator Dirksen, this is the 15th of
2 June and in 15 days the surtax will expire. In those 15
3 days can Congress finally stir itself to pass this bill through
4 both Houses?

5 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Bill, it could, but I am not sure
6 whether it will or not. Now, when they vote that out of the
7 committee, it goes to the Rules Committee in the House. Then,
8 of course, you have to take time to finish the debate in the
9 House. Then it comes to the Senate. Now, I don't know
10 whether Chairman Long is agreeable to this kind of an arrange-
11 ment or not, but we always have minor tax bills pending
12 in the Senate Finance Committee.

13 Now, you could take this and also that exemption for
14 the poverty people that is carried in that House proposal, you
15 could tie that into a minor tax bill and quickly get it to the
16 Senate floor. Then the question is, how much debate will
17 there be before the deadline and can you agree with the
18 House, get it out of there, get it down to the President in
19 time for signature.

20 MR. LAWRENCE: If you don't, what then?

21 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, you have got this problem and
22 that is the withholding tables.

23 MR. LAWRENCE: What about a simple extension for 30 days
24 or 90 days; is it feasible?

25 SENATOR DIRKSEN: If you can get it done.

1 MR. LAWRENCE: Do you think you can?

2 SENATOR DIRKSEN: I am not sure, but at least a try will
3 be made.

4 MR. LAWRENCE: What if you can't get it? What about
5 these wage and price controls?

6 SENATOR DIRKSEN: On the withholding tables, of course,
7 I think they will be quite agreeable to an extension of time
8 so that you don't get caught foul, but whether or not they
9 will actually extend the surtax beyond the deadline is another
10 thing.

11 In the House they will do it, I am quite sure. In the
12 Senate it might be a different dish, and it is difficult to
13 get any kind of a hard nose count as a predicate for an
14 absolute statement that it will be done, but I am hopeful.

15 MR. LAWRENCE: Senator, we are almost out of time. Let
16 me ask you some quick questions now about politics if I can.
17 Do you agree with so many Republicans and so many Democrats
18 that Senator Ted Kennedy is the inevitable challenger of
19 Richard Nixon in 1972?

20 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, it could be later. It might not
21 necessarily be 1972.

22 I think those who are in Teddy's corner obviously are
23 astute enough to assess the possibilities in 1972. He is a
24 young man and you wouldn't want to waste that future if you
25 thought it was in jeopardy in '72. That is a matter that you

1 can't determine until you have the impact of all these con-
2 ditions on the national mood and how they may vote in '72.

3 MR. DONALDSON: You know you have had a number of spats
4 now publicly on the floor with Teddy Kennedy and there is an
5 interesting theory that it is all part of a plan to begin to
6 undercut him and to aid President Nixon in '72. Is that what
7 you are doing?

8 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, Sam, perish the thought. My affec-
9 tion for Teddy, as you know, is as high as the highest star,
10 and it is as deep as the deepest ocean.

11 But, if these are things that come along which may be
12 a reflection upon the capabilities of our commanders in the
13 field, then obviously I must respond. I tried to be as
14 classical about it as I could. I even dipped into history,
15 168 B. C. --

16 MR. DONALDSON: But you read that speech and there is
17 the theory that it was coordinated with the White House be-
18 cause you normally don't read a speech. Was it coordinated
19 with the White House?

20 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Sam, if you have got to know, some lady
21 out on the Pacific coast sent this to me. That was the
22 incident of General Paulus, which is recorded by the historian
23 Livey. How I forgot it in all my years, I don't know, but
24 it was right on the nose, as they say, and so in the most
25 temperate way I could make the point and still not invite any

1 real repercussion.

2 MR. DONALDSON: Thank you very much, Senator Dirksen, for
3 being with us today on ISSUES AND ANSWERS.

4 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Thank you.

5 (Next week: Senator J. William Fulbright.)
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