

32 Informal Exchange with Reporters After Visiting Senator John Stennis at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. *February 7, 1973*

REPORTER. How is the Senator this morning, sir?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I just talked to the doctors, and they say that he is considerably improved over what he was yesterday. As you know, the situation was considered to be quite grave yesterday morning and yesterday afternoon, and late last night, at midnight, I called Dr. Tkach, our doctor, and had him check with the doctors here, and they said he had had a very good night, up to that time, and apparently it went on for the balance of the night.

This morning at 8 o'clock I called again and found that he could take visitors. They have not encouraged visitors up to this time, so that is also a good sign. You can't judge these things. The doctors say he has been a remarkably resilient patient, that he has, of course, very enormous problems because of what happened to him, but he is in excellent shape.

They make the point, for example, that his tissues are much younger than a man of 72 would normally have. Now, I judge it by another thing—his handshake. He has always had a grip of steel, and I reached out and I thought after what he had been through that, you know, he would sort of be limp, but that handshake just came on as strong as it ever was. So as far as his spirit is concerned, it is ex-

cellent. That will help him some. He has excellent medical care, and he has made a remarkable comeback from where he was yesterday.

It still, of course, is a very serious situation. But the doctors are much more hopeful today, and being—everybody is an amateur doctor to an extent—I think he is going to make it. And he is going to make it.

Q. What did you say to him this morning, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I said to him that the whole country was praying for him, that he was one that had done so much to help his country, that now the country was trying to help him, and that he was really an indispensable man in the Senate, with his strong leadership of the Armed Services Committee.

I told him how much I had depended upon him and that I was just waiting for him to get back so we could still have him there. I think one of the most important factors in a patient's recovery—and I would say this to all the people in the hospitals here and around the country—is that the individual must know that he is needed.

Of course, Senator Stennis knows that, but it is good to hear it, and I would urge that when people call on patients at hospitals, rather than sympathizing about all

of their symptoms and the rest, to make it pretty apparent that they are missed and that they are needed, and that gives people that extra will to live. And that will to live is what you really need when you get close to that border point, as to whether you are going to make it or not.

The Senator's got that will to live in spades, and he has an awful lot of people pulling for him, not just in the Senate, not just in his own party, not just in his own State, but all over the country, because he is a national Senator. He represents the Nation, not one region.

And another thing that is rather characteristic of him is he is such a kind man. I would say I don't know of anybody in the Senate, Republican or Democratic—many disagree with him because he is a strong national defense man, and those

who want to weaken the national defense, for this reason or that, disagree with him—but there is no one that dislikes John Stennis. They all love him because he is such a fine man. That is why you want him to get back there.

Thank you.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT. Okay. Good luck to you. I told the doctors—incidentally, I congratulated them all—I said I hope I don't ever have to come out here to have them work on me. I don't expect to, either. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 9:20 a.m. outside the Center.

Senator John C. Stennis of Mississippi was shot during a robbery in front of his Northwest Washington home on January 30, 1973.