

On the evening of March 31, 1968, America's President - Lyndon Baines Johnson - requested broadcast time. At 9 PM, he spoke to the nation.

Most people expected to hear his assessment of how things were going in Vietnam. America was embroiled, deeply, in that conflict on that day.

Few people expected to hear the President's assessment of how things were going in his personal life. The President announced, that night, that he would not seek reelection as America's leader.

The LBJ Library provides the [entire text of his speech](#). This video clip excerpts its ending. The spoken words, here, are as follows:

*Throughout my entire public career I have followed the personal philosophy that I am a free man, an American, a public servant, and a member of my party, in that order always and only.*

*For 37 years in the service of our Nation, first as a Congressman, as a Senator, and as Vice President, and now as your President, I have put the unity of the people first. I have put it ahead of any divisive partisanship.*

*And in these times as in times before, it is true that a house divided against itself by the spirit of faction, of party, of region, of religion, of race, is a house that cannot stand.*

*There is division in the American house now. There is divisiveness among us all tonight. And holding the trust that is mine, as President of all the people, I cannot disregard the peril to the progress of the American people and the hope and the prospect of peace for all peoples.*

*So, I would ask all Americans, whatever their personal interests or concern, to guard against divisiveness and all its ugly consequences.*

*Fifty-two months and 10 days ago, in a moment of tragedy and trauma, the duties of this office fell upon me. I asked then for your help and God's, that we might continue America on its course, binding up our wounds, healing our history, moving forward in new unity, to clear the American agenda and to keep the American commitment for all of our people.*

*United we have kept that commitment. United we have enlarged that commitment.*

*Through all time to come, I think America will be a stronger nation, a more just society, and a land of greater opportunity and fulfillment because of what we have all done together in these years of unparalleled achievement.*

*Our reward will come in the life of freedom, peace, and hope that our children will enjoy through ages ahead.*

*What we won, when all of our people united, just must not now be lost in suspicion, distrust, selfishness, and politics among any of our people.*

*Believing this as I do, I have concluded that I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year.*

*With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office - the Presidency of your country.*

*Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.*

*But let men everywhere know, however, that a strong, a confident, and a vigilant America stands ready tonight to seek an honorable peace - and stands ready tonight to defend an honored cause - whatever the price, whatever the burden, whatever the sacrifice that duty may require.*

*Thank you for listening.*

*Good night and God bless all of you.*

Michael Beschloss, a Johnson historian, tells a story about the day Lyndon Johnson left office:

*On Inauguration Day [1969], Johnson saw Nixon sworn in, then got on the plane to fly back to Texas. When the front door of the plane closed, Johnson pulled out a cigarette - his first cigarette he had smoked since his heart attack in 1955. One of his daughters pulled it out of his mouth and said, "Daddy, what are you doing? You're going to kill yourself." He took it back and said, "I've now raised you girls. I've now been President. Now it's my time!" From that point on, he went into a very self-destructive spiral.* (Michael Beschloss, LBJ historian, author of *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965.*)

The "spiral" did not last very long.

LBJ, who'd let his hair grow long, was having lots of chest pains but continued to smoke after he left the White House. At his Texas ranch - on the 22nd of January, 1973 - he made a desperate call to his Secret Service agents, complaining of "massive chest pains."

By the time his agents reached him, the former President - then 64 years old - was dead. He was still holding the telephone receiver.

Credits:

Clip from President Johnson's speech, delivered from his White House office, on the 31st of March, 1968. Clip online, courtesy the LBJ Library via the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia.

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