Lyndon B. Johnson

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"LBJ" redirects here. For other uses, see LBJ (disambiguation).

Lyndon Baines Johnson (/ˈlɪndən ˈbeɪnz/; August 27, 1908 – January 22, 1973), often referred to by his initials **LBJ**, was an American politician who served as the 36th President of the United States from 1963 to 1969, assuming the office after having served as the 37th Vice President of the United States from 1961 to 1963. A Democrat from Texas, he also served as a United States Representative and as the Majority Leader in the United States Senate. Johnson is one of only four people who have served in all four federal elected positions.[a]

Born in a farmhouse in Stonewall, Texas, Johnson was a high school teacher and worked as a Congressional aide before winning election to the House of Representatives in 1937. He won election to the Senate in 1948, and was appointed the position of Senate Majority Whip in 1951. He became the Senate Minority Leader in 1953 and the Senate Majority Leader in 1955. As a leader in the Senate, Johnson became known for his domineering personality and the "Johnson treatment", his aggressive coercion of powerful politicians to advance legislation. Johnson ran for the Democratic nomination in the 1960 presidential election. Although unsuccessful, he accepted the invitation of then-Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts to be his running mate. They went on to win a close election over the Republican ticket of Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., and Johnson was sworn in as Vice President on January 20, 1961. On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, and Johnson succeeded Kennedy as president. The following year, Johnson won a landslide in 1964, defeating Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

In domestic policy, Johnson designed the "Great Society" legislation by expanding civil rights, public broadcasting, Medicare, Medicaid, aid to education,

Lyndon B. Johnson

Lyndon B. Johnson in March 1964

36th President of the United States	
In office	November 22, 1963 – January 20, 1969
Vice President	*None* (1963–1965) Hubert Humphrey (1965–1969)
Preceded by	John F. Kennedy
Succeeded by	Richard Nixon
37th Vice President of the United States	
In office	January 20, 1961 – November 22, 1963
President	John F. Kennedy
Preceded by	Richard Nixon
Succeeded by	Hubert Humphrey
United States Senator from Texas	
In office	January 3, 1949 – January 3, 1961
Preceded by	W. Lee O'Daniel
Succeeded by	William A. Blakley
Senate Majority Leader	
In office	January 3, 1955 – January 3, 1961

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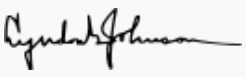
the arts, urban and rural development, public services, and his "War on Poverty". Assisted in part by a growing economy, the War on Poverty helped millions of Americans rise above the poverty line during his administration.[1] Civil-rights bills that he signed into law banned racial discrimination in public facilities, interstate commerce, the workplace, and housing; the Voting Rights Act prohibited certain requirements in southern states used to disenfranchise African Americans. With the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the country's immigration system was reformed, encouraging greater immigration from regions other than Europe. Johnson's presidency marked the peak of modern liberalism after the New Deal era.

In foreign policy, Johnson escalated American involvement in the Vietnam War. In 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which granted Johnson the power to use military force in Southeast Asia without having to ask for an official declaration of war. The number of American military personnel in Vietnam increased dramatically, from 16,000 advisors in non-combat roles in 1963 to 525,000 in 1967, many in combat roles. American casualties soared, and the peace process became bogged-down. Growing unease with the war stimulated a large, angry anti-war movement based chiefly on university campuses.

Johnson faced further troubles when summer riots broke out in most major cities after 1965, and crime rates soared, as his opponents raised demands for "law and order" policies. While Johnson began his presidency with widespread approval, support for him declined as the public became upset with both the war and the growing violence at home. In 1968, the Democratic Party factionalized as anti-war elements denounced Johnson; he ended his bid for renomination after a disappointing finish in the New Hampshire primary. Nixon was elected to succeed him, as the New Deal coalition that had dominated presidential politics for 36 years collapsed. After he left office in January 1969, Johnson returned to his Texas ranch, where he died of a heart attack at age 64 on January 22, 1973.

Johnson is ranked favorably by many historians because of his domestic policies and the passage of many major laws that affected civil rights, gun

Deputy	Earle C. Clements Mike Mansfield
Preceded by	William F. Knowland
Succeeded by	Mike Mansfield
Senate Minority Leader	
In office January 3, 1953 – January 3, 1955	
Deputy	Earle C. Clements
Preceded by	Styles Bridges
Succeeded by	William F. Knowland
Senate Majority Whip	
In office January 3, 1951 – January 3, 1953	
Leader	Ernest McFarland
Preceded by	Francis J. Myers
Succeeded by	Leverett Saltonstall
Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas's 10th district	
In office April 10, 1937 – January 3, 1949	
Preceded by	James P. Buchanan
Succeeded by	Homer Thornberry
Personal details	
Born	Lyndon Baines Johnson August 27, 1908 Stonewall, Texas, U.S.
Died	January 22, 1973 (aged 64) Stonewall, Texas, U.S.
Resting place	Johnson Family Cemetery
Political party	Democratic
Spouse(s)	Lady Bird Taylor (m. 1934)
Children	Lynda and Luci
Parents	Samuel Ealy Johnson Jr. and Rebekah Baines
Education	Texas State University (BA) Georgetown University
Civilian awards	Presidential Medal of Freedom (Posthumous; 1980)
Signature	
Military service	
Allegiance	United States
Service/branch	United States Navy
Years of service	1940–1941 (Inactive) 1941–1942 (Active) 1942–1964 (Reserve)
Rank	Commander

control, wilderness preservation, and Social Security, although he has also drawn substantial criticism for his handling of the Vietnam War.[2][3]

Contents [hide]

Unit	U.S. Naval Reserve
Battles/wars	World War II • Salamaua-Lae campaign
Military awards	Silver Star

Early years

Seven-year-old Johnson with his trademark cowboy hat

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born on August 27, 1908, near Stonewall, Texas, in a small farmhouse on the Pedernales River.[4] He was the oldest of five children born to Samuel Ealy Johnson Jr. and Rebekah Baines.[5][6] Johnson had one brother, Sam Houston Johnson, and three sisters; Rebekah, Josefa, and Lucia.[7] The nearby small town of Johnson City, Texas, was named after LBJ's cousin, James Polk Johnson,[8][9] whose forebears had moved west from Georgia.[10] Johnson had English, German, and Ulster Scots ancestry.[11] His patrilineal descent traces back to John Johnson, born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland in 1590.[12] He was maternally descended from pioneer Baptist clergyman George Washington Baines, who pastored eight churches in Texas, as well as others in Arkansas and Louisiana. Baines, the grandfather of Johnson's mother, was also the president of Baylor University during the American Civil War.[13]

Johnson's grandfather, Samuel Ealy Johnson Sr., was raised as a Baptist, and for a time was a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In his later years the grandfather became a Christadelphian; Johnson's father also joined the Christadelphian Church toward the end of his life.[14] Later, as a politician, Johnson was influenced in his positive attitude toward Jews by the religious beliefs that his family, especially his grandfather, had shared with him (see Operation Texas).[15] Johnson's favorite Bible verse came from the King James Version of Isaiah 1:18. "Come now, and let us reason together ..."[16]

Johnson's boyhood home in Johnson City, Texas

In school, Johnson was an awkward, talkative youth and was elected president of his 11th-grade class. He graduated in 1924 from Johnson City High School, where he participated in public speaking, debate, and baseball.[17][18] At age 15, Johnson was the youngest member of his class. Pressured by his parents to attend college, he enrolled at a "subcollege" of Southwest Texas State Teachers College (SWTSTC) in the summer of 1924, where students from unaccredited high schools could take the 12th-grade courses needed for admission to college. He left the school just weeks after his arrival, and decided to move to Southern California. He worked at his cousin's legal practice and in various odd jobs before returning to Texas, where he worked as a day laborer.[19]

In 1926, Johnson managed to enroll at SWTSTC (now Texas State University). He worked his way through school, participated in debate and campus politics, and edited the school newspaper,

The College Star.[20] The college years refined his skills of persuasion and political organization. For nine months, from 1928 to 1929, Johnson paused his studies to teach Mexican-American children at the segregated Welhausen School in Cotulla, some 90 miles (140 km) south of San Antonio in La Salle County. The job helped him to save money to complete his education, and he graduated in 1930. He briefly taught at Pearsall High School before taking a position as teacher of public speaking at Sam Houston High School in Houston.[21]

When he returned to San Marcos in 1965, after signing the Higher Education Act of 1965, Johnson reminisced:

> I shall never forget the faces of the boys and the girls in that little Welhausen Mexican School, and I remember even yet the pain of realizing and knowing then that college was closed to practically every one of those children because they were too poor. And I think it was then that I made up my mind that this nation could never rest while the door to knowledge remained closed to any American.[22]

Entry into politics

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor James Allred of Texas, and Johnson, 1937. Johnson later used an edited version of this photo, with Allred airbrushed out, in his 1941 senatorial campaign.[23]

After Richard M. Kleberg won a 1931 special election to represent Texas in the United States House of Representatives, he appointed Johnson as his legislative secretary. Johnson got the position on the recommendation of his own father and that of State Senator Welly Hopkins, who Johnson had campaigned for in 1930.[24] Kleberg had little interest in performing the day-to-day duties of a Congressman, instead delegating them to Johnson.[25] After Franklin D. Roosevelt won the 1932 presidential election, Johnson became a staunch supporter of Roosevelt's New Deal.[26] Johnson was elected speaker of the "Little Congress," a group of Congressional aides, where he cultivated Congressmen, newspapermen, and lobbyists. Johnson's friends soon included aides to President Roosevelt as well as fellow Texans such as Vice President John Nance Garner and Congressman Sam Rayburn.[27]

Johnson married Claudia Alta Taylor, also known as "Lady Bird", of Karnack, Texas on November 17, 1934, after he attended Georgetown University Law Center for several months. The wedding was officiated by Rev. Arthur R. McKinstry at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in San Antonio.[28] They had two daughters, Lynda Bird, born in 1944, and Luci Baines, born in 1947. Johnson gave his children names with the LBJ initials; his dog was Little Beagle Johnson. His was the LBJ Ranch; his initials were on his cufflinks, ashtrays, and clothes.[29]

In 1935, he was appointed head of the Texas National Youth Administration, which enabled him to use the government to create education and job opportunities for young people. He resigned two years later to run for Congress. Johnson, a notoriously tough boss throughout his career, often demanded long workdays and work on weekends.[30] He was described by friends, fellow politicians, and historians as motivated by an exceptional lust for power and control. As Johnson's biographer Robert Caro observes, "Johnson's ambition was uncommon—in the degree to which it was unencumbered by even the slightest excess weight of ideology, of philosophy, of principles, of beliefs."[31]

Career in U.S. House of Representatives (1937–1949)

In 1937, Johnson successfully campaigned in a special election for Texas's 10th congressional district, that covered Austin and the surrounding hill country. He ran on a New Deal platform and was effectively aided by his wife. He served in the House from April 10, 1937, to January 3, 1949.[32] President Franklin D. Roosevelt found Johnson to be a welcome ally and conduit for information, particularly with regard to issues concerning internal politics in Texas (Operation Texas) and the machinations of Vice President John Nance Garner and Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn. Johnson was immediately appointed to the Naval Affairs Committee. He worked for rural electrification and other improvements for his district. Johnson steered the projects towards contractors that he personally knew, such as the Brown Brothers, Herman and George, who would finance much of Johnson's future career.[18] In 1941, he ran for the Democratic U.S. Senate nomination in a special election; his main opponent was the sitting Governor of Texas, businessman and radio personality W. Lee O'Daniel; Johnson narrowly lost the Democratic primary, which was then tantamount to election, with O'Daniel receiving 175,590 votes (30.49%), and Johnson 174,279 (30.26%).

Active military duty (1941–1942)

LCDR Johnson, March 1942

Johnson was appointed a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve on June 21, 1940. While serving as a U.S. congressman, he was called to active duty three days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. His orders were to report to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C. for instruction and training.[33] Following his training, he asked Undersecretary of the Navy James Forrestal for a combat assignment.[34] He was sent instead to inspect the shipyard facilities in Texas and on the West Coast. In the spring of 1942, President Roosevelt needed his own reports on what conditions were like in the Southwest Pacific. Roosevelt felt that information which flowed up the military chain of command needed to get delivered by a highly trusted political aide. From a suggestion by Forrestal, Roosevelt assigned Johnson to a three-man survey team of the Southwest Pacific.[35]

Johnson reported to General Douglas MacArthur in Australia. Johnson and two U.S. Army officers went to the 22nd Bomb Group base, which was assigned the high risk mission of bombing the Japanese airbase at Lae in New Guinea. Johnson's roommate was an army second lieutenant who was a B-17 bomber pilot. On June 9, 1942, Johnson volunteered as an observer for an air strike mission on New Guinea by eleven B-26 bombers that included his roommate in another plane. While on the mission, his roommate and his crew's B-26 bomber was shot down with none of the eight men surviving the crash into the water. Reports vary on what happened to the B-26 bomber carrying Johnson during that mission. Johnson's biographer Robert Caro accepts Johnson's account, and supports it with testimony from the aircrew concerned: the aircraft was attacked, disabling one engine, and it turned back before reaching its objective, though remaining under heavy fire. Others claim that it turned back because of generator trouble before reaching the objective and before encountering enemy aircraft and never came under fire. This is supported by official flight records.[36][37] Other airplanes that continued to the target came under fire near the target at about the same time that Johnson's plane was recorded as having landed back at the original airbase. MacArthur recommended Johnson for the Silver Star for gallantry in

action: the only member of the crew to receive a decoration.[38] After it was approved by the army, he personally presented the medal to Johnson, with the following citation:[36]

> For gallantry in action in the vicinity of Port Moresby and Salamaula, New Guinea, on June 9, 1942. While on a mission of obtaining information in the Southwest Pacific area, Lieutenant Commander Johnson, in order to obtain personal knowledge of combat conditions, volunteered as an observer on a hazardous aerial combat mission over hostile positions in New Guinea. As our planes neared the target area they were intercepted by eight hostile fighters. When, at this time, the plane in which Lieutenant Commander Johnson was an observer, developed mechanical trouble and was forced to turn back alone, presenting a favorable target to the enemy fighters, he evidenced marked coolness in spite of the hazards involved. His gallant actions enabled him to obtain and return with valuable information.

Johnson who had used a camera as an observer,[39] reported to Roosevelt, to the Navy leaders, and to Congress that conditions were deplorable and unacceptable: some historians have suggested this was in exchange for MacArthur's recommending of a Silver Star for him.[40] He argued that the South West Pacific urgently needed a higher priority and a larger share of war supplies. The warplanes sent there, for example, were "far inferior" to Japanese planes, and morale was bad. He told Forrestal that the Pacific Fleet had a "critical" need for 6,800 additional experienced men. Johnson prepared a twelve-point program to upgrade the effort in the region, stressing "greater cooperation and coordination within the various commands and between the different war theaters." Congress responded by making Johnson chairman of a high-powered subcommittee of the Naval Affairs Committee,[41] with a mission similar to that of the Truman Committee in the Senate. He probed the peacetime "business as usual" inefficiencies that permeated the naval war and demanded that admirals shape up and get the job done. Johnson went too far when he proposed a bill that would crack down on the draft exemptions of shipyard workers if they were absent from work too often; organized labor blocked the bill and denounced him. Johnson's biographer, Robert Dallek concludes, "The mission was a temporary exposure to danger calculated to satisfy Johnson's personal and political wishes, but it also represented a genuine effort on his part, however misplaced, to improve the lot of America's fighting men."[42]

In addition to the Silver Star, Johnson received the American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. He was released from active duty on July 17, 1942 and remained in the Navy Reserve, later promoted to commander on October 19, 1949 (effective June 2, 1948). He resigned from the Navy Reserve effective January 18, 1964.[43]

Career in U.S. Senate (1949–1961)

Contested 1948 election

In the 1948 elections, Johnson again ran for the Senate and won in a highly controversial result in a three-way Democratic Party primary. Johnson faced a well-known former governor, Coke Stevenson, and George Peddy (a former state representative of District 8 in Shelby County). Johnson drew crowds to fairgrounds with his rented helicopter dubbed "The Johnson City Windmill". He raised money to flood the state with campaign circulars and won over conservatives by voting for the Taft-Hartley act (curbing union power) as well as by criticizing unions. Stevenson came in first but lacked a majority, so a runoff was held; Johnson campaigned even harder, while Stevenson's efforts slumped.

The runoff count took a week, handled by the Democratic State Central Committee (because this was a party primary). Johnson was finally announced the winner by 87 votes out of 988,295 cast. The Committee voted to certify Johnson's nomination by a majority of one (29–28), with the last vote cast on Johnson's behalf by Temple, Texas, publisher Frank W. Mayborn. There were many allegations of voter fraud; one writer alleges that Johnson's campaign manager, future Texas governor John B. Connally, was connected with 202 ballots in Precinct 13 in Jim Wells County where the names had curiously been listed in alphabetical order with the same pen and handwriting, just at the close of polling. Some of these voters insisted that they had not voted that day.[44] Robert Caro argued in his 1989 book that Johnson had thus stolen the election in Jim Wells County, and that 10,000 ballots were also rigged in Bexar County alone.[45] Election judge Luis Salas said in 1977 that he had certified 202 fraudulent ballots for Johnson.[46] The state Democratic convention upheld Johnson. Stevenson went to court, but Johnson prevailed—with timely help from his friend Abe Fortas. He soundly defeated Republican Jack Porter in the general election in November and went to Washington, permanently dubbed "Landslide Lyndon." Johnson, dismissive of his critics, happily adopted the nickname.[47]

As U.S. Senator from Texas

Freshman senator to majority whip

Once in the Senate, Johnson was known among his colleagues for his highly successful "courtships" of older senators, especially Senator Richard Russell, Democrat from Georgia, the leader of the Conservative coalition and arguably the most powerful man in the Senate. Johnson proceeded to gain Russell's favor in the same way that he had "courted" Speaker Sam Rayburn and gained his crucial support in the House.

Johnson was appointed to the Senate Armed Services Committee, and later in 1950, he helped create the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. Johnson became its chairman and conducted investigations of defense costs and efficiency. These investigations revealed old investigations and demanded actions that were already being taken in part by the Truman Administration, although it can be said that the committee's investigations reinforced the need for changes. Johnson gained headlines and national attention through his handling of the press, the efficiency with which his committee issued new reports, and the fact that he ensured that every report was endorsed unanimously by the committee. Johnson used his political influence in the Senate to receive broadcast licenses from the Federal Communications Commission in his wife's name.[46][48] After the 1950 general elections, Johnson was chosen as Senate Majority Whip in 1951 under the new Majority Leader, Ernest McFarland of Arizona, and served from 1951 to 1953.[32]

Senate Democratic leader

In the 1952 general election, Republicans won a majority in both the House and Senate. Among defeated Democrats that year was McFarland, who lost to upstart Barry Goldwater. In January 1953, Johnson was chosen by his fellow Democrats to be the minority leader; he became the most junior Senator ever elected to this position. One of his first actions was to eliminate the seniority system in making appointments to committees, while retaining it for chairmanships. In the 1954 election, Johnson was re-elected to the Senate, and since the Democrats won the

majority in the Senate, Johnson then became majority leader. Former majority leader William Knowland became minority leader. Johnson's duties were to schedule legislation and help pass measures favored by the Democrats. Johnson, Rayburn and President Dwight D. Eisenhower worked well together in passing Eisenhower's domestic and foreign agenda.[*citation needed*]

Senate Desk X, used by all Democratic leaders, including Johnson, since Joseph Taylor Robinson

During the Suez Crisis, Johnson tried to prevent the US government from criticizing the Israeli invasion of the Sinai peninsula. Along with the rest of the nation, Johnson was appalled by the threat of possible Soviet domination of space flight implied by the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite *Sputnik 1*, and used his influence to ensure passage of the 1958 National Aeronautics and Space Act, which established the civilian space agency NASA.

Historians Caro and Dallek consider Lyndon Johnson the most effective Senate majority leader in history. He was unusually proficient at gathering information. One biographer suggests he was "the greatest intelligence gatherer Washington has ever known", discovering exactly where every Senator stood on issues, his philosophy and prejudices, his strengths and weaknesses and what it took to get his vote.[49] Robert Baker claimed that Johnson would occasionally send senators on NATO trips in order to avoid their dissenting votes.[50] Central to Johnson's control was "The Treatment",[51] described by two journalists:

President Johnson endeavors to give "The Treatment" to Senator Richard Russell in 1963

> The Treatment could last ten minutes or four hours. It came, enveloping its target, at the Johnson Ranch swimming pool, in one of Johnson's offices, in the Senate cloakroom, on the floor of the Senate itself—wherever Johnson might find a fellow Senator within his reach.
>
> Its tone could be supplication, accusation, cajolery, exuberance, scorn, tears, complaint, and the hint of threat. It was all of these together. It ran the gamut of human emotions. Its velocity was breathtaking, and it was all in one direction. Interjections from the target were rare. Johnson anticipated them before they could be spoken. He moved in close, his face a scant millimeter from his target, his eyes widening and narrowing, his eyebrows rising and falling. From his pockets poured clippings, memos, statistics. Mimicry, humor, and the genius of analogy made The Treatment an almost hypnotic experience and rendered the target stunned and helpless.[52]

A 60-cigarette-per-day smoker, Johnson suffered a near-fatal heart attack on July 2, 1955. He abruptly gave up smoking as a result, with only a couple of exceptions, and did not resume the habit until he left the White House on January 20, 1969. Johnson announced he would remain as his party's leader in the Senate on New Year's Eve 1955, his doctors reporting he had made "a most satisfactory recovery" since his heart attack five months prior.[53][54]

Campaigns of 1960

See also: United States presidential election, 1960

Johnson's success in the Senate rendered him a potential Democratic presidential candidate; he had been the "favorite son" candidate of the Texas delegation at the Party's national convention in 1956, and appeared to be in a strong position to run for the 1960 nomination. Jim Rowe repeatedly urged Johnson to launch a campaign in early 1959, but Johnson thought it better to wait, thinking that John Kennedy's efforts would create a division in the ranks which could then be exploited. Rowe finally joined the Humphrey campaign in frustration, another move which Johnson thought played into his own strategy.[55]

Candidacy for president

Johnson made a late entry into the campaign in July 1960 which, coupled with a reluctance to leave Washington, allowed the rival Kennedy campaign to secure a substantial early advantage among Democratic state party officials. Johnson underestimated Kennedy's endearing qualities of charm and intelligence, as compared to his own reputation as the more crude and wheeling-dealing "Landslide Lyndon".[56] Caro suggests that Johnson's hesitancy was the result of an overwhelming fear of failure.[57]

Johnson attempted in vain to capitalize on Kennedy's youth, poor health, and failure to take a position regarding Joseph McCarthy.[58] He had formed a "Stop Kennedy" coalition with Adlai Stevenson, Stuart Symington, and Hubert Humphrey, but it proved a failure. Johnson received 409 votes on the only ballot at the Democratic convention to Kennedy's 806, and so the convention nominated Kennedy. Tip O'Neill was a representative from Kennedy's home state of Massachusetts at that time, and he recalled that Johnson approached him at the convention and said, "Tip, I know you have to support Kennedy at the start, but I'd like to have you with me on the second ballot." O'Neill replied, "Senator, there's not going to be any second ballot."[59]

Vice-presidential nomination

According to Kennedy's Special Counsel Myer Feldman and to Kennedy himself, it is impossible to reconstruct the precise manner in which Johnson's vice-presidential nomination ultimately took place. Kennedy did realize that he could not be elected without support of traditional Southern Democrats, most of whom had backed Johnson; nevertheless, labor leaders were unanimous in their opposition to Johnson. After much back and forth with party leaders and others on the matter, Kennedy did offer Johnson the vice-presidential nomination at the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel at 10:15 am on July 14, the morning after he was nominated, and Johnson accepted. From that point to the actual nomination that evening, the facts are in dispute in many respects. (Convention chairman LeRoy Collins' declaration of a two-thirds majority in favor by voice vote is even disputed.)[60]

Seymour Hersh stated that Robert F. Kennedy (known as Bobby) hated Johnson for his personal attacks on the Kennedy family, and later maintained that his brother offered the position to Johnson merely as a courtesy, expecting him to decline. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. concurred with Robert Kennedy's version of events, and put forth that John Kennedy would have preferred Stuart Symington as his running-mate, alleging that Johnson teamed with House Speaker Sam Rayburn and pressured Kennedy to favor Johnson.[61] Robert Kennedy wanted his brother to choose labor leader Walter Reuther.[62]

Biographer Robert Caro offered a different perspective; he wrote that the Kennedy campaign was desperate to win what was forecast to be a very close election against Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge Jr.. Johnson was needed on the ticket to help carry Texas and the Southern states. Caro's research showed that on July 14, John Kennedy started the process while Johnson was still asleep. At 6:30 am, John Kennedy asked Robert Kennedy to prepare an estimate of upcoming electoral votes "including Texas".[63] Robert called Pierre Salinger and Kenneth O'Donnell to assist him. Salinger realized the ramifications of counting Texas votes as their own, and asked him whether he was considering a Kennedy-Johnson ticket, and Robert replied "yes".[63] Caro contends that it was then that John Kennedy called Johnson to arrange a meeting; he also called Pennsylvania governor David L. Lawrence, a Johnson backer, to request that he nominate Johnson for vice president if Johnson were to accept the role. According to Caro, Kennedy and Johnson met and Johnson said that Kennedy would have trouble with Kennedy supporters who were anti–Johnson. Kennedy returned to his suite to announce the Kennedy-Johnson ticket to his closest supporters, including northern political bosses. O'Donnell was angry at what he considered a betrayal by Kennedy, who had previously cast Johnson as anti-labor and anti-liberal. Afterward, Robert Kennedy visited labor leaders who were extremely unhappy with the choice of Johnson and, after seeing the depth of labor opposition to Johnson, Robert ran messages between the hotel suites of his brother and Johnson—apparently trying to undermine the proposed ticket without John Kennedy's authorization.[63]

Caro continues in his analysis that Robert Kennedy tried to get Johnson to agree to be the Democratic Party chairman rather than vice president. Johnson refused to accept a change in plans unless it came directly from John Kennedy. Despite his brother's interference, John Kennedy was firm that Johnson was who he wanted as running mate; he met with staffers such as Larry O'Brien, his national campaign manager, to say that Johnson was to be vice president. O'Brien recalled later that John Kennedy's words were wholly unexpected, but that after a brief consideration of the electoral vote situation, he thought "it was a stroke of genius".[63] When John and Robert Kennedy next saw their father Joe Kennedy, he told them that signing Johnson as running mate was the smartest thing that they had ever done.[64]

Re-election to U.S. Senate

At the same time as his vice presidential run, Johnson also sought a third term in the U.S. Senate. According to Robert Caro, "On November 8, 1960, Lyndon Johnson won election for both the vice presidency of the United States, on the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, and for a third term as senator (he had Texas law changed to allow him to run for both offices). When he won the vice presidency, he made arrangements to resign from the Senate, as he was required to do under federal law, as soon as it convened on January 3, 1961."[65] (In 1988, Lloyd Bentsen, the vice presidential running mate of Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis, and a Senator from Texas, took advantage of "Lyndon's law," and was able to retain his seat in the Senate despite Dukakis' loss to George H. W. Bush.)

Johnson was re-elected Senator with 1,306,605 votes (58 percent) to Republican John Tower's 927,653 (41.1 percent). Fellow Democrat William A. Blakley was appointed to replace Johnson as Senator, but Blakley lost a special election in May 1961 to Tower.

Vice Presidency (1961–1963)

After the election, Johnson was quite concerned about the traditionally ineffective nature of his new office, and set about to assume authority not allotted to the position. He initially sought a

transfer of the authority of Senate majority leader to the vice presidency, since that office made him president of the Senate, but faced vehement opposition from the Democratic Caucus, including members whom he had counted as his supporters.[66]

President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson stroll outside the White House prior to a ceremony

Johnson sought to increase his influence within the executive branch. He drafted an executive order for Kennedy's signature, granting Johnson "general supervision" over matters of national security, and requiring all government agencies to "cooperate fully with the vice president in the carrying out of these assignments." Kennedy's response was to sign a non-binding letter requesting Johnson to "review" national security policies instead.[67] Kennedy similarly turned down early requests from Johnson to be given an office adjacent to the Oval Office, and to employ a full-time Vice Presidential staff within the White House.[68] His lack of influence was thrown into relief later in 1961 when Kennedy appointed Johnson's friend Sarah T. Hughes to a federal judgeship, whereas Johnson had tried and failed to garner the nomination for Hughes at the beginning of his vice presidency. House Speaker Sam Rayburn wrangled the appointment from Kennedy in exchange for support of an administration bill.

Moreover, many members of the Kennedy White House were contemptuous of Johnson, including the president's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, and they ridiculed his comparatively brusque, crude manner. Congressman Tip O'Neill recalled that the Kennedy men "had a disdain for Johnson that they didn't even try to hide....They actually took pride in snubbing him."[69]

Opening Day of 1961 baseball season. President Kennedy throws out the first ball at Griffith Stadium, the home field of the Washington Senators, as LBJ and Hubert Humphrey look on.

Kennedy, however, made efforts to keep Johnson busy, informed, and at the White House often, telling aides, "I can't afford to have my vice president, who knows every reporter in Washington, going around saying we're all screwed up, so we're going to keep him happy."[70] Kennedy appointed him to jobs such as head of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities, through which he worked with African Americans and other minorities. Kennedy may have intended this to remain a more nominal position, but Taylor Branch in *Pillar of Fire* contends that Johnson pushed the Kennedy administration's actions further and faster for civil rights than Kennedy originally intended to go. Branch notes the irony of Johnson being the advocate for civil rights, when the Kennedy family had hoped that he would appeal to conservative southern voters. In particular, he notes Johnson's Memorial Day 1963 speech at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania as being a catalyst that led to more action.

Johnson took on numerous minor diplomatic missions, which gave him limited insights into global issues, as well as opportunities at self-promotion in the name of showing the country's flag. He attended Cabinet and National Security Council meetings. Kennedy gave Johnson control over all presidential appointments involving Texas, and appointed him chairman of the President's Ad Hoc Committee for Science.[71]

Kennedy also appointed Johnson Chairman of the National Aeronautics Space Council. The Soviets beat the US with the first manned spaceflight in April 1961, and Kennedy gave Johnson the task of evaluating the state of the US space program and recommending a project that would allow the US to catch up or beat the Soviets.[72] Johnson responded with a recommendation that the US gain the leadership role by committing the resources to embark on a project to land an American on the Moon in the 1960s.[73][74] Kennedy assigned priority to the space program, but Johnson's appointment provided potential cover in case of a failure.[75]

Johnson was touched by a Senate scandal in August 1963 when Bobby Baker, the Secretary to the Majority Leader of the Senate and a protégé of Johnson's, came under investigation by the Senate Rules Committee for allegations of bribery and financial malfeasance. One witness alleged that Baker had arranged for the witness to give kickbacks for the Vice President. Baker resigned in October, and the investigation did not expand to Johnson. The negative publicity from the affair fed rumors in Washington circles that Kennedy was planning on dropping Johnson from the Democratic ticket in the upcoming 1964 presidential election. However, on October 31, 1963, a reporter asked if he intended and expected to have Johnson on the ticket the following year. Kennedy replied, "Yes to both those questions."[76] There is little doubt that Robert Kennedy and Johnson hated each other,[77] yet John and Robert Kennedy agreed that dropping Johnson from the ticket could produce heavy losses in the South in the 1964 election, and they agreed that Johnson would stay on the ticket.[78][79]

Presidency (1963–1969)

Main article: Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson

Johnson's presidency took place during a healthy economy, with steady growth and low unemployment. Regarding the rest of the world, there were no serious controversies with major countries. Attention therefore focused on domestic policy, and, after 1966, on the Vietnam War.

LBJ is sworn in on *Air Force One* by Judge Sarah Hughes as Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy look on

Succession

Main article: First inauguration of Lyndon B. Johnson

Johnson was quickly sworn in as President on *Air Force One* in Dallas on November 22, 1963, just 2 hours and 8 minutes after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, amid suspicions of a conspiracy against the government.[80] He was sworn in by U.S. District Judge Sarah T. Hughes, a family friend. In the rush, a Bible was not at hand, so Johnson took the oath of office using a Roman Catholic missal from President Kennedy's desk.[81] Cecil Stoughton's iconic photograph of Johnson taking the presidential oath of office as Mrs. Kennedy looks on is the most famous photo ever taken aboard a presidential aircraft.[82][83]

He was convinced of the need to make an immediate transition of power after the assassination to provide stability to a grieving nation in shock. He and the Secret Service were concerned that he could also be a target of a conspiracy, and felt compelled to rapidly remove the new president from Dallas and return him to Washington. This was greeted by some with assertions that Johnson was in too much haste to assume power.[84]

In the days following the assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson made an address to Congress saying that "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory

than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought so long."[85] The wave of national grief following the assassination gave enormous momentum to Johnson's promise to carry out Kennedy's plans and his policy of seizing Kennedy's legacy to give momentum to his legislative agenda.

On November 29, 1963, just one week after Kennedy's assassination, Johnson issued an executive order to rename NASA's Apollo Launch Operations Center and the NASA/Air Force Cape Canaveral launch facilities as the John F. Kennedy Space Center.[86] Cape Canaveral was officially known as Cape Kennedy from 1963-1973.[87][88]

Johnson was alert to the public demand for answers. To head off snowballing speculation about such conspiracies, he immediately created a panel headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, known as the Warren Commission, to investigate Kennedy's assassination.[89] The commission conducted extensive research and hearings and unanimously concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the assassination. Conspiracy theorists were not satisfied and they stayed active.[90]

Johnson retained senior Kennedy appointees, some for the full term of his presidency. He even retained Robert Kennedy as Attorney General, with whom he had a notoriously difficult relationship. Robert Kennedy remained in office for a few months until leaving in 1964 to run for the Senate.[91] Although Johnson had no official chief of staff, Walter Jenkins was the first among a handful of equals and presided over the details of daily operations at the White House. George Reedy, who was Johnson's second-longest-serving aide, assumed the post of press secretary when John F. Kennedy's own Pierre Salinger left that post in March 1964.[92] Horace Busby was another "triple-threat man," as Johnson referred to his aides. He served primarily as a speech writer and political analyst.[93] Bill Moyers was the youngest member of Johnson's staff. He handled scheduling and speechwriting part-time.[94]

Rapid legislative initiatives

The new president thought it advantageous to quickly pursue one of Kennedy's primary legislative goals—a tax cut. Johnson worked closely with Harry F. Byrd of Virginia to negotiate a reduction in the budget below $100 billion in exchange for what became overwhelming Senate approval of the Revenue Act of 1964. Congressional approval followed at the end of February, and facilitated efforts to follow on civil rights.[95] In late 1963 Johnson also launched the initial offensive of his War on Poverty, recruiting Kennedy relative Sargent Shriver, then head of the Peace Corps, to spearhead the effort. In March 1964, LBJ sent to Congress the Economic Opportunity Act, which created the Job Corps and the Community Action Program, designed to attack poverty locally. The act also created VISTA, Volunteers in Service to America, a domestic counterpart to the Peace Corps.[96]

Civil Rights Movement

President Kennedy had submitted a civil-rights bill to Congress in June 1963, which was met with strong opposition.[97][98] Johnson renewed the effort and asked Bobby Kennedy to spearhead the undertaking for the administration on Capitol Hill. This provided adequate political cover for Johnson should the effort fail; but if it were successful, Johnson would receive ample credit.[99] Historian Robert Caro notes that the bill Kennedy had

Meeting with civil rights leaders Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. (left),

Whitney Young, and James Farmer in the Oval Office in 1964

submitted was facing the same tactics that prevented the passage of civil rights bills in the past; southern congressmen and senators used congressional procedure to prevent it from coming to a vote.[100] In particular, they held up all of the major bills Kennedy had proposed and that were considered urgent, especially the tax reform bill, in order to force the bill's supporters to pull it.[100]

Johnson was quite familiar with the procedural tactic, as he played a role in a similar tactic against a civil rights bill that Harry Truman had submitted to Congress fifteen years earlier.[100] In that fight, a rent-control renewal bill was held up until the civil-rights bill was withdrawn.[100] Believing that the current course meant that the Civil Rights Act would suffer the same fate, he adopted a different strategy from that of Kennedy, who had mostly removed himself from the legislative process. By tackling the tax cut first, the previous tactic was eliminated.[101]

Passing the civil rights bill in the House required getting it through the Rules Committee, which had been holding it up in an attempt to kill it. Johnson decided on a campaign to use a discharge petition to force it onto the House floor.[102] Facing a growing threat that they would be bypassed, the House rules committee approved the bill and moved it to the floor of the full House, which passed it shortly thereafter by a vote of 290–110.[103] In the Senate, since the tax bill had passed three days earlier, the anti-civil-rights senators were left with the filibuster as their only remaining tool. Overcoming the filibuster required the support of over twenty Republicans, who were growing less supportive due to the fact that their party was about to nominate for president a candidate who opposed the bill.[104] According to Caro, it was ultimately Johnson's ability to convince Republican leader Everett Dirksen to support the bill that amassed the necessary Republican votes to overcome the filibuster in March 1964; after 75 hours of debate, the bill passed the Senate by a vote of 71–29.[105][106] Johnson signed the fortified Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law on July 2.[106] Legend has it that the evening after signing the bill, Johnson told an aide, "I think we just delivered the South to the Republican party for a long time to come", anticipating a coming backlash from Southern whites against Johnson's Democratic Party.[107]

Biographer Randall B. Woods has argued that Johnson effectively used appeals to Judeo-Christian ethics to garner support for the civil rights law. Woods writes that Johnson undermined the Southern filibuster against the bill:

> LBJ wrapped white America in a moral straight jacket. How could individuals who fervently, continuously, and overwhelmingly identified themselves with a merciful and just God continue to condone racial discrimination, police brutality, and segregation? Where in the Judeo-Christian ethic was there justification for killing young girls in a church in Alabama, denying an equal education to black children, barring fathers and mothers from competing for jobs that would feed and clothe their families? Was Jim Crow to be America's response to "Godless Communism"? [108]

Woods states that Johnson's religiosity ran deep: "At 15 he joined the Disciples of Christ, or Christian, church and would forever believe that it was the duty of the rich to care for the poor, the strong to assist the weak, and the educated to speak for the inarticulate."[109] Johnson shared the beliefs of his mentor, FDR, in that he paired liberal values to religious values, believing that freedom and social justice served both God and man.[110]

The Great Society

Johnson wanted a catchy slogan for the 1964 campaign to describe his proposed domestic agenda for 1965. Eric Goldman, who joined the White House in December of that year, thought Johnson's domestic program was best captured in the title of Walter Lippman's book, *The Good Society*. Richard Goodwin tweaked it—to "The Great Society"—and incorporated this in detail as part of a speech for Johnson in May 1964 at the University of Michigan. It encompassed movements of urban renewal, modern transportation, clean environment, anti-poverty, healthcare reform, crime control, and educational reform.[111]

1964 presidential election

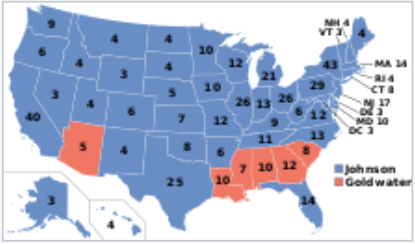
Main article: United States presidential election, 1964

In Spring 1964, Johnson did not look optimistically upon the prospect of being elected president in his own right.[112] A pivotal change took place in April when he assumed personal management of negotiations between the railroad brotherhood and the railroad industry over the issue of featherbedding. Johnson emphasized to the parties the potential impact upon the economy of a strike. After considerable horse trading, especially with the carriers who won promises from the president for greater freedom in setting rights and more liberal depreciation allowances by the IRS, Johnson got an agreement. This substantially boosted his self-confidence as well as his image.[113]

That same year, Robert F. Kennedy was widely considered an impeccable choice to run as Johnson's vice presidential running mate but Johnson and Kennedy however had never liked one another and Johnson, afraid that Kennedy would be credited with his election as president, abhorred the idea and opposed it at every turn.[114] Kennedy was himself undecided about the position and, knowing that the prospect rankled Johnson, was content in refusing to eliminate himself from consideration. Ultimately, Goldwater's poor polling numbers degraded any dependence Johnson might have had on Kennedy as his running mate.[115] Hubert Humphrey's selection as vice president then became a foregone conclusion, and was thought to strengthen Johnson in the Midwest and industrial Northeast.[116] Johnson, knowing full well the degree of frustration inherent in the office of vice president, put Humphrey through a gauntlet of interviews to guarantee his absolute loyalty and having made the decision, he kept the announcement from the press until the last moment to maximize media speculation and coverage.[117]

In preparation for the Democratic convention, Johnson requested the FBI send a squad of 30 agents to cover convention activities; the objective of the squad was to inform the White House staff of any disruptive activities on the floor. The squad's focus narrowed upon the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) delegation, which sought to displace the white segregationist delegation regularly selected in the state. The squad's activities also included wiretaps of Martin Luther King's room as well as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). From beginning to end, the squad's assignment was carefully couched in terms of the monitoring of disruptive activities that might endanger the president and other high-ranking officials.[118]

In fact, Johnson was very concerned about potential political damage from media coverage of racial tensions exposed by a credentials fight between the MFDP and the segregationist delegation, and he assigned Humphrey the job of managing the problem.[119] The convention's Credentials Committee declared that two MFDP delegates in the delegation be seated as observers and



1964 presidential election results

agreed to "bar future delegations from states where any citizens are deprived of the right to vote by reason of their race or color."[120] The MFDP rejected the committee's ruling. The convention became the apparent personal triumph that Johnson craved, but a sense of betrayal caused by the marginalization of the MFDP would trigger disaffection with Johnson and the Democratic Party from the left; SNCC chairman John Lewis would call it a "turning point in the civil rights movement."[121]


Full "Daisy" advertisement

Early in the 1964 presidential campaign, Barry Goldwater appeared to be a strong contender, with strong support from the South, which threatened Johnson's position as he had predicted in reaction to the passage of the Civil Rights Act. However, Goldwater lost momentum as his campaign progressed. On September 7, 1964, Johnson's campaign managers broadcast the "Daisy ad". It portrayed a little girl picking petals from a daisy, counting up to ten. Then a baritone voice took over, counted down from ten to zero and the visual showed the explosion of a nuclear bomb. The message conveyed was that electing Goldwater president held the danger of a nuclear war. Goldwater's campaign message was best symbolized by the bumper sticker displayed by supporters claiming "In your heart, you know he's right.". Opponents captured the spirit of Johnson's campaign with bumper stickers that said "In your heart, you know he might" and "In your gut, you know he's nuts".[122] Johnson won the presidency by a landslide with 61.05 percent of the vote, making it the highest ever share of the popular vote.[123] At the time, this was also the widest popular margin in the 20th century—more than 15.95 million votes—this was later surpassed by incumbent President Nixon's victory in 1972.[124] In the Electoral College, Johnson defeated Goldwater by a margin of 486 to 52. Johnson won 44 states, compared to Goldwater's six. Voters also gave Johnson the largest majorities in Congress since FDR's election in 1936—a Senate with a 68–32 majority and a house with a 295–140 Democratic margin.[125]

Voting Rights Act

Johnson began his elected presidential term with similar motives as he had upon succeeding to the office, ready to "carry forward the plans and programs of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Not because of our sorrow or sympathy, but because they are right."[126] He was reticent to push southern congressmen even further after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and suspected their support may have been temporarily tapped out. Nevertheless, the Selma to Montgomery marches in Alabama led by Martin Luther King ultimately led Johnson to initiate debate on a voting rights bill in February 1965.[127]

Johnson gave a congressional speech—Dallek considers it his greatest—in which he said "rarely at anytime does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself…rarely are we met with the challenge… to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved nation. The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation."[128] In 1965, he achieved passage of a second civil rights bill called the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination in voting thus allowing millions of southern blacks to vote for the first time. In accordance with the act, several states, "seven of the eleven southern states of the former confederacy" (Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Virginia) were subjected to the procedure of preclearance in 1965

while Texas, then home to the largest African American population of any state, followed in 1975.[129] The Senate passed the voting rights bill by a vote of 77–19 just after 2 1/2 months and won passage in the house in July, by 333–85. The results were significant—between the years of 1968 and 1980, the number of southern black elected state and federal officeholders nearly doubled. The act also made a large difference in the numbers of black elected officials nationally —in 1965, a few hundred black office-holders mushroomed to 6,000 in 1989.[128]

President Lyndon B. Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks at the signing of the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965

After the murder of civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo, Johnson went on television to announce the arrest of four Ku Klux Klansmen implicated in her death. He angrily denounced the Klan as a "hooded society of bigots," and warned them to "return to a decent society before it's too late." Johnson was the first President to arrest and prosecute members of the Klan since Ulysses S. Grant about 93 years earlier.[b][130] He turned to themes of Christian redemption to push for civil rights, thereby mobilizing support from churches North and South.[131] At the Howard University commencement address on June 4, 1965, he said that both the government and the nation needed to help achieve goals, "To shatter forever not only the barriers of law and public practice, but the walls which bound the condition of many by the color of his skin. To dissolve, as best we can, the antique enmities of the heart which diminish the holder, divide the great democracy, and do wrong—great wrong—to the children of God...[132]

In 1967, Johnson nominated civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall to be the first African American justice of the Supreme Court. To head the new Department of Housing and Urban Development, Johnson appointed Robert C. Weaver—the first African-American cabinet secretary in any U.S. presidential administration. In 1968 Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which provided for equal housing opportunities regardless of race, creed, or national origin. The impetus for the law's passage came from the 1966 Chicago Open Housing Movement, the April 4, 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil unrest across the country following King's death.[133] On April 5, Johnson wrote a letter to the United States House of Representatives urging passage of the Fair Housing Act.[134] With newly urgent attention from legislative director Joseph Califano and Democratic Speaker of the House John McCormack, the bill (which was previously stalled) passed the House by a wide margin on April 10.[133][135]

Immigration

President Johnson signs the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 as Sen. Edward Kennedy, Sen. Robert Kennedy, and others look on.

With the passage of the sweeping Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the country's immigration system was reformed and all national origins quotas dating from the 1920s were removed. The annual rate of inflow doubled between 1965 and 1970, and doubled again by 1990, with dramatic increases from Asia and Mexico.[46] Scholars give Johnson little credit for the law, which was not one of his priorities; he had supported the McCarren-Walters Act of 1952 that was unpopular with reformers.[136]

Federal funding for education

Johnson, whose own ticket out of poverty was a public education in Texas, fervently believed that education was a cure for ignorance and poverty, and was an essential component of the American dream, especially for minorities who endured poor facilities and tight-fisted budgets from local taxes.[137] He made education the top priority of the Great Society agenda, with an emphasis on helping poor children. After the 1964 landslide brought in many new liberal Congressmen, LBJ launched a legislative effort which took the name of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The bill sought to double federal spending on education from $4 billion to $8 billion.;[138] with considerable facilitating by the White House, it passed the House by a vote of 263 to 153 on March 26 and then it remarkably passed without change in the Senate, by 73 to 8, without going through the usual conference committee. This was an historic accomplishment by the president, with the billion dollar bill passing as introduced just 87 days before.[139]

For the first time, large amounts of federal money went to public schools. In practice ESEA meant helping all public school districts, with more money going to districts that had large proportions of students from poor families (which included all the big cities).[140] For the first time private schools (most of them Catholic schools in the inner cities) received services, such as library funding, comprising about 12 percent of the ESEA budget. Though federal funds were involved, they were administered by local officials, and by 1977 it was reported that less than half of the funds were actually applied toward the education of children under the poverty line. Dallek further reports that researchers cited by Hugh Davis Graham soon found that poverty had more to do with family background and neighborhood conditions than the quantity of education a child received. Early studies suggested initial improvements for poor children helped by ESEA reading and math programs, but later assessments indicated that benefits faded quickly and left pupils little better off than those not in the schemes. Johnson's second major education program was the Higher Education Act of 1965, which focused on funding for lower income students, including grants, work-study money, and government loans.

Although ESEA solidified Johnson's support among K-12 teachers' unions, neither the Higher Education Act nor the new endowments mollified the college professors and students growing increasingly uneasy with the war in Vietnam.[141] In 1967, Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act to create educational television programs to supplement the broadcast networks.

In 1965, Johnson also set up the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, to support academic subjects such as literature, history, and law, and arts such as music, painting, and sculpture (as the WPA once did).[142]

"War on Poverty" and healthcare reform

Former president Truman and wife Bess at Medicare Bill signing in 1965, as Lady Bird and Hubert Humphrey look on

In 1964, at Johnson's request, Congress passed the Revenue Act of 1964 and the Economic Opportunity Act, as part of the war on poverty. Johnson set in motion legislation creating programs such as Head Start, food stamps and Work Study.[143] During Johnson's years in office, national poverty declined significantly, with the percentage of Americans living below the poverty line dropping from 23 percent to 12 percent.[2]

Johnson took an additional step in the War on Poverty with an urban renewal effort, presenting to Congress in January 1966 the "Demonstration Cities Program". To be eligible a city would need to demonstrate its readiness to

"arrest blight and decay and make substantial impact on the development of its entire city." Johnson requested an investment of $400 million per year totaling $2.4 billion. In the fall of 1966 the Congress passed a substantially reduced program costing $900 million, which Johnson later called the Model Cities Program. Changing the name had little effect on the success of the bill; the New York Times wrote 22 years later that the program was for the most part a failure.[144]

Johnson's initial effort to improve healthcare was the creation of The Commission on Heart Disease, Cancer and Strokes (HDCS). Combined, these diseases accounted for 71 percent of the nation's deaths in 1962.[145] To enact recommendations of the commission, Johnson asked Congress for funds to set up the Regional Medical Program (RMP), to create a network of hospitals with federally funded research and practice; Congress passed a significantly watered down version.

As a back-up position, in 1965 Johnson turned his focus to hospital insurance for the aged under Social Security.[146] The key player in initiating this program, named Medicare, was Wilbur Mills, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. In order to reduce Republican opposition, Mills suggested that Medicare be fashioned as a three layer cake—hospital insurance under Social Security, a voluntary insurance program for doctor visits and an expanded medical welfare program for the poor, known as Medicaid.[147] The bill passed the house by a margin of 110 votes on April 8. The effort in the Senate was considerably more complicated; however, the Medicare bill passed Congress on July 28 after negotiation in a conference committee.[148] Medicare now covers tens of millions of Americans.[149] Johnson gave the first two Medicare cards to former President Harry S Truman and his wife Bess after signing the Medicare bill at the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri.[150]

Transportation

In March 1965, Johnson sent to Congress a transportation message which included the creation of a new Transportation Department—which would include the Commerce Department's Office of Transportation, the Bureau of Public Roads, the Federal Aviation Agency, the Coast Guard, the Maritime Administration, the Civil Aeronautics Board and the Interstate Commerce Commission. The bill passed the Senate after some negotiation over navigation projects; in the house, passage required negotiation over maritime interests and the bill was signed October 15, 1965.[151]

Gun control

On October 22, 1968, Lyndon Johnson signed the Gun Control Act of 1968, one of the largest and farthest-reaching federal gun control laws in American history. Much of the motivation for this large expansion of federal gun regulations came as a response to the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Space program

During Johnson's administration, NASA conducted the Gemini manned space program, developed the Saturn V rocket and its launch facility, and prepared to make the first manned Apollo program flights. On January 27, 1967, the nation was stunned when the entire crew of Apollo 1 was killed in a cabin fire during a spacecraft test on the launch pad, stopping Apollo in its tracks. Rather than appointing another Warren-style commission, Johnson accepted Administrator James E. Webb's request for NASA to do its own investigation, holding itself accountable to Congress and the President.[152] Johnson maintained his staunch support of Apollo through Congressional and press controversy, and the program recovered. The first two manned missions,