

Nixon on Disputed Session

Following are a question and answer from the transcript of a news conference conducted by President Nixon on Aug. 22, 1973, in San Clemente, Calif., as recorded by The New York Times. The question involved a conversation that took place March 21, 1973, at the White House in which Mr. Nixon, H. R. Haldeman and John W. Dean 3d participated.

Yesterday, a Watergate grand jury, in its indictment of Mr. Haldeman and six others, accused Mr. Haldeman of perjury for his assertion, before the Senate Watergate committee, that the President had said "it would be wrong" to provide hush money to the seven original Watergate defendants. Mr. Haldeman made the statement on July 30, 1973. The President's news conference took place three weeks later.

Q. Mr. President, could you tell us your recollection of what you told John Dean on March 21 on the subject of raising funds for the Watergate defendants?

A. Certainly. Mr. Haldeman has testified to that, and his statement is accurate.

Basically, what Mr. Dean was concerned about on March 21 was not so much the raising of money for the defendants but the raising of money for the defendants for the purpose of keeping them still. In other words so-called hush money.

The one would be legal, in other words raising the defense funds for any group, any individual, as you know, is perfectly legal and is done all the time. But you raise funds for the purpose of keeping an individual from talking, that's obstruction of justice.

Mr. Dean said also, on March 21, that there was an attempt to, as he put it, to blackmail the White House, by one of the defendants; incidentally, that defendant has

denied it, but at least this is what Mr. Dean had claimed and that unless certain amounts of money were paid, I think it was \$120,000 for attorneys' fees and other support, that this particular defendant would make a statement, not with regard to Watergate but with regard to some national security matters in which Mr. Ehrlichman had particular responsibility.

My reaction very briefly was this: I said as you look at this, I said isn't it quite obvious, first, that if it is going to have any chance to succeed, that these individuals aren't going to sit there in jail for four years, they're going to have clemency. Isn't that correct?

He said yes.

I said we can't give clemency.

He agreed.

Then I went to another point. The second point is that isn't it quite obvious, as far as this is concerned, that while we could raise the money, and he indicated in answer to my question that it would probably take a million dollars over four years to take care of this defendant and others on this kind of basis, the problem was, how do you get the money to them. And also, how do you get around the problem of clemency because they're not going to stay in jail simply because their families are being taken care of.

And so that was why I concluded, as Mr. Haldeman recalls, perhaps, and did testify very effectively, are when I said John, it's wrong, it won't work, we can't give clemency, and we've got to get this story out. And therefore I direct you and I direct Haldeman and I direct Ehrlichman and I direct Mitchell to get together tomorrow and then meet with me as to how we get this story out.

And that's how the meeting on the 22d [sic] took place.