

12 Days of Crisis: How Watergate

Unfolded Since April 17

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Among the several political crises he has endured through 27 years of public life, there may not have been a more difficult time for Richard M. Nixon than the past 2 days.

Since April 17, the Watergate cases has exploded, filling Washington with a series of disclosures, accusations and countercharges that have come so fast they are difficult to sort out.

The President set off the barrage with his announcement on April 17 that there were "major developments" in the Watergate case and that "real progress has been made in finding the truth."

To understand the sequence of events since then, it is important also to place in perspective certain other developments, not all of them made public when they occurred, that preceded the dramatic White House announcement.

First, on March 20, White House counsel John W. Dean III, according to reliable sources, went to Mr. Nixon and told him that to "save the presidency" he (Dean) and the President's two top deputies—H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman—would have to tell what they knew about the Watergate bugging and cover-up and face the consequences of going to jail.

Three days later, on March 23, a letter from convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica was made public. The letter charged that others besides the

seven convicted conspirators were involved in the bugging incident.

On March 26, Dean, composing his thoughts at Camp David, the presidential retreat in the Maryland mountains, received a highly publicized call from Mr. Nixon in which the President expressed full confidence in him. Also around this time, a lawyer for the Committee for the Re-election of the President is known to have gone to federal prosecutors and told what he said he knew about alleged payments of campaign funds to buy the silence of the Watergate conspirators.

Dean, apparently believing that Haldeman and Ehrlichman would follow his lead, reportedly went to the prosecutors on April 6 and disclosed what he knew about the bugging incident and subsequent cover-up. To date, Haldeman and Ehrlichman are not known to have talked to the prosecutors.

On April 19, Dean publicly declared he would not be a scapegoat in the Watergate case.

April 14, the Saturday before the President's announcement, Jeb Stuart Magruder, a former special assistant to the President, spoke with federal prosecutors. It was learned later that Magruder had implicated himself, Dean and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell in planning the bugging and, later, payments to the convicted conspirators. That night, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst told two reporters for The Washington Post that the Watergate case "is

going to blow up."

On Sunday, April 15, Kleindienst and Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen met privately with the President in the Executive Office Building. They went over what they knew about the case and agreed that Kleindienst would disqualify himself from the investigation, now to be headed by Petersen.

It was also apparently on this day that Petersen learned from federal prosecutors that acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III had destroyed Watergate documents (from the White House office of convicted conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.) after a meeting with Dean and Ehrlichman.

Monday, April 16, was relatively quiet. The Watergate grand jury resumed its sessions, but there were no new sensational disclosures. That night, the President went sailing on the Potomac River with an old and trusted adviser, Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

TUESDAY, APRIL 17

There were reports throughout the day that Haldeman and Ehrlichman would resign. During the morning, the two presidential assistants arranged to retain the services in the Watergate case of John J. Wilson, a highly respected Washington lawyer.

Around noon, the White House announced there would be a major announcement that afternoon and speculation on high-level resignations increased. At 4:30 p.m., after two postponements, Mr. Nixon strode into the White House press office and read his announcement of "major developments" in the case. He said he had launched his own investigation into the case on March 21—the day after Dean had come to him

it was later learned with his plea to "save the presidency."

Retreating from his earlier position, the President said he would allow his aides to testify before the Senate select committee investigating the Watergate case. He also announced that immunity from prosecution would not be granted to those involved in the affair and that government employees indicted in the case would be suspended. As Republican officials reacted with relief and praise for the announcement, presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said previous White House statements on the Watergate case were "inoperative."

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18

Reports of impending resignations continued, centering on Haldeman and Dean. The Washington Post was told by one source that Magruder's statements to federal prosecutors were expected to result in the indictment of Dean and Mitchell. Late in the day, the President traveled to Camp David with Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

THURSDAY, APRIL 19

Magruder was scheduled to testify before the grand jury, but did not. At 11:45 a.m., Dean's secretary, bypassing the White House press office, called newspapers with Dean's "scapegoat" announcement. There were immediate reports that Dean was ready to tell a grand jury that Haldeman and other top White House officials actively participated in a cover-up to hide the involvement of presidential aides in the Watergate bugging.

Other events occurred rapidly. Mitchell was subpoenaed to appear before the grand jury the next day. Mitchell, in Washington, retained the services of lawyer William G. Hundley, a close personal friend of Petersen, who is heading the federal investigation. Wilson, the lawyer for Haldeman and Ehrlichman, met for an hour with the President, discussing the Watergate case.

Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's personal attorney, visited federal prosecutors and later appeared before the grand jury. At U.S.

District Court, Peter H. Wolf, an attorney for an unidentified client who worked for the Nixon re-election committee, filed papers saying his client took eight cartons of material—from a White House office the day after the break-in.

FRIDAY APRIL 20

The President met with what was described as his badly shaken cabinet, vowing, according to sources, "to get to the bottom" of the Watergate scandal. "We've had our Cambodias before," he told cabinet members, apparently expressing confidence the administration could ride out the crisis.

Outside his home in Georgetown, Haldeman flatly denied to a radio reporter that he is about to resign. Later in the day, Mr. Nixon flew to Key Biscayne for the Easter weekend, but without Haldeman or Ehrlichman from past practice. Mitchell, meanwhile, testified for three hours before the grand jury and later conceded to reporters that he sat in on discussions of bugging attempts but always vetoed them.

SATURDAY, APRIL 21

The New York Times reported that Dean supervised the payment of more than \$175,000 in campaign funds to the convicted Watergate conspirators for their silence and there were reports that the grand jury was concentrating on Haldeman's role in any cover-up attempts. The latest Gallup poll showed 41 per cent of the nation believes the Watergate affairs reveals corruption in the Nixon administration.

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 22

The President attended services at the Key Biscayne Presbyterian Church, where the Rev. John Huffman urged parishioners to admit past mistakes. The Washington Post, quoting high executive department sources, reported that Mr. Nixon was warned that administration aides were involved in the Watergate case as early as last December. The White House staff was reportedly demoralized, but from Florida the President placed calls to Dean, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, wishing them "Happy Easter" and telling

Dean, "You're still counsel to the President."

MONDAY, APRIL 23

A White House spokesman in Florida announced there was no change in the status of any presidential aide. In Washington, the judges of the U.S. District court ordered an investigation into the leaks of verbatim grand jury testimony to columnist Jack Anderson. Dean and Magruder were expected to appear before the grand jury, but it was not known if the grand jury met.

TUESDAY, APRIL 24

The Washington Post reported that a grand jury in New York investigating a \$200,000 cash contribution to the Nixon campaign by Robert Vesco, a central figure in a Securities and Exchange Commission fraud probe, was concentrating on the roles of Mitchell and Maurice H. Stans, former Nixon campaign finance chief. The grand jury was about ready to return indictments, it was reported.

In Washington, Ken Rietz suddenly resigned as director of the Republican's "New

Majority Campaign for 1974" and left the city. An aide to Rietz earlier had been linked to the payment of \$150 a week to a student to spy on radical groups.

The President returned to Washington amid speculation that former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird or former Treasury Secretary John Connally would be asked to replace Haldeman.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25

The Post reported that the Nixon re-election committee engineered a phony favorable public response to the President's decision to mine Haiphong harbor in

the spring of 1972. Vice President Agnew, speaking out on the Watergate case for the first time in weeks, told a press conference he had "full confidence" in the President's integrity and ability to resolve the scandal.

Columnist Jack Anderson visited federal prosecutors in the case and promised to stop publishing transcripts of the grand jury sessions. It was still not known whether the grand jury had met during the week. Wilson, attorney for Haldeman and Ehrlichman, met for the second time with the President.

THURSDAY, APRIL 26

The Post reported that the Nixon re-election campaign also rigged the results of a local television poll to reflect a favorable response to the mining of Haiphong harbor and that Laird rejected an offer to take over as chief of staff at the White House.

Presidential Press Secretary Ziegler, meanwhile, said no White House staff resignations had been offered or requested. Attorney Wilson conferred with Haldeman and Ehrlichman at the White House, and later with the chief federal prosecutor in the case. Ag-

new, speaking to a group of Harvard students, said he would "resign and speak out" if he ever found himself in deep disagreement with the President over a matter of conscience.

At the Commerce Department, Magruder resigned the post he had held since leaving the Nixon campaign committee.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25

Acting FBI Director Gray reportedly destroyed files belonging to convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt after being told by Dean and Ehrlichman that the files "should never see the light of day."

At 2:30 p.m., Gray resigned—the second resignation linked to the Watergate. A few hours later, the White House announced the temporary appointment of William D. Ruckelshaus, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and a high official not touched by the Watergate disclosures, to head the FBI.

Across the country, in Los Angeles, a judge in the Pentagon Papers trial disclosed a memo alleging that two of the Watergate conspirators had burglarized the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, one of the Pentagon Papers defendants.