

Haldeman Says Key Tapes Don't Show President Was Aware of the Cover-Up

Former Top Aide Suggests Blame Is Dean's, Mitchell's

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By Lawrence Meyer
Washington Post Staff Writer

Former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman testified yesterday that he has listened to two of the recorded conversations between President Nixon and John W. Dean III that the Senate select Watergate committee and special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox have tried unsuccessfully to get from President Nixon.

Apparently catching the Senate committee by surprise as he began his testimony yesterday, Haldeman said he has listened to the President's tape of two of the meetings in which, former White House counsel Dean has testified, President Nixon indicated knowledge of the Watergate cover-up. Haldeman also was present at one of these meetings and part of the other.

Haldeman's version of the two meetings, on Sept. 15, 1972, and March 21, 1973, which he said is based on the tapes, agrees with many of the details Dean described in his testimony. But Haldeman disagreed emphatically with Dean that these details or anything else recorded on the tapes show that Mr. Nixon was aware of the cover-up.

In refusing to turn over the tapes of these and other Presidential conversations to the Senate committee, President Nixon said on July 23: "The tapes, which have been

under my personal control, will remain so. None has been transcribed or made public and none will be."

Haldeman said he listened to the March 21, 1973, tape in his White House office in April while still the President's chief of staff. Haldeman said he listened to the Sept. 15, 1972, tape at his home where he kept it "overnight" early this month, more than two months after his resignation from the White House on April 30.

Haldeman testified that he was asked to listen to these two tapes by President Nixon himself, who, Haldeman said, asked him to report back on their contents. Haldeman said he took notes on the tapes and turned them over to the President. Under questioning from the Senate committee, Haldeman said the notes were no longer available to him and that he was testifying about the tapes' contents from memory.

The committee did not learn of the tapes' existence until July 13 during a routine staff interview with Alexander P. Butterfield, a former aide to Haldeman and one of the few other men in the White House who knew of Mr. Nixon's practice of recording all meetings and telephone conversations in the White House Oval Office and his Executive Office Building office, among other places.

In explaining his refusal to turn over the tapes to the Senate committee or to special prosecutor Cox, Mr. Nixon also said on July 23: "The fact is that the tapes would not finally settle the central issues before your committee. Before their existence became publicly known, I personally listened to a number of them. The tapes are entirely consistent with what I know to be the truth and what I have stated to be the truth.

"However, as in any verbatim recording of informal conversations, they contain comments that persons with different perspectives and motivations would inevitably interpret in different ways," Mr. Nixon said.

Haldeman's revelation that he had listened to the two tapes—but no others—came as he read to the Senate committee late yesterday afternoon a two-hour opening state-

See HALDEMAN, A19, Col. 1



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Chief counsel Samuel Dash, right, has a confidential word with Rufus L. Edmisten, deputy committee counsel.

HALDEMAN, From A1

ment in which he denied any prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging or participation in the subsequent cover-up.

Like fellow top White House aide John D. Ehrlichman, who completed five days of testimony before the committee earlier yesterday afternoon, Haldeman also extended his defense to President Nixon, to whom he reported directly during his White House years.

"It now appears there was a cover-up," Haldeman told the committee. "The critical question becomes who committed these acts, who directed them, who was aware of them?"

"I committed no such acts,

directed no such acts and was aware of none until March of this year. I am convinced the President was not aware of such acts until March of this year."

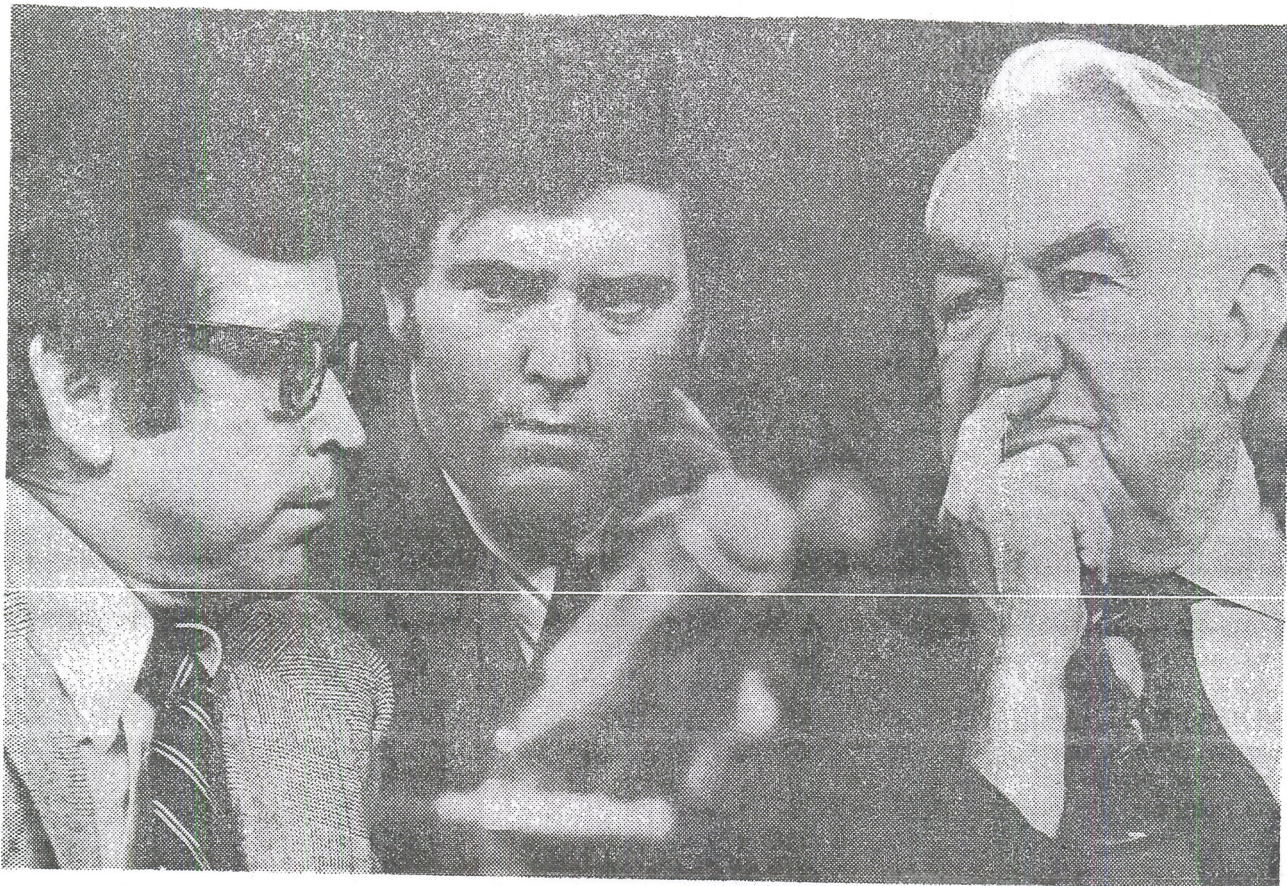
Like Ehrlichman, his close friend and associate in the White House, Haldeman also strongly suggested that former White House counsel Dean was responsible for the cover-up, possibly in cooperation with former Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

Dean, Haldeman said, was assigned the task of keeping up to date with developments in the Watergate investigation last summer and fall, and with keeping the rest of the White House abreast of them. "He apparently did not keep up fully posted," Haldeman said of Dean, "and it now appears

he did not keep us accurately posted."

For the nation watching the hearings, as well as for many of the reporters present, Haldeman's appearance before the committee was the first sight of the man often described as the first person President Nixon saw every morning and the last he saw ever night.

Although close to Ehrlichman—Haldeman and Ehrlichman now share the same lawyers and are variously described in Washington as "Hans and Fritz" and the "Berlin Wall" because of their closeness and shared German ancestry—Haldeman indicated that he was even closer to Mr. Nixon. Unlike Ehrlichman or Presidential foreign policy adviser Henry Kissinger,



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Sen. Howard Baker, deputy committee counsel Rufus L. Edmisten and Sam Sen. Ervin Jr. get their heads together.

Haldeman said, "I had no independent schedule. I was at the call of the President at all times."

Deeply tan and looking perhaps younger than his 46 years because of his brush haircut and trim condition, the former advertising executive read with almost no emotion the opening statement in which he generally and specifically denied any wrongdoing whatsoever.

In broad outline, Haldeman's statement agreed with the thesis expounded by Ehrlichman throughout his testimony: that they were too busy with other matters to be concerned with the Watergate affair until March of this year, that Dean was left to keep an eye on the matter for President Nixon and that far from covering up the Watergate affair, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and the President were consistently trying to find the truth to tell it to the public.

"The specifics of Watergate and the activities of the investigation following Watergate were not a principal focus of interest in the White House or by the President during the period of June, 1972, up to March,

1973," Haldeman said. "My own notes on meetings with the President during that period indicated very few and very brief references to Watergate." To illustrate his point, Haldeman said that his notes for that period comprise a stack of paper eight inches high, but, taking all the notes mentioning Watergate, he has a pile only one-eighth of an inch.

Distinguishing between an effort to "contain" Watergate during the campaign and an effort to "cover-up," Haldeman acknowledged that political measures which he said were legal were taken to soften the impact of the Watergate affair on the 1972 election campaign. The President, Haldeman said, also was legitimately concerned about the Watergate investigation touching on national security matters involving some of the participants in the Watergate burglary.

Haldeman also denied a series of specific charges made against him by previous witnesses:

He denied that prior to

former deputy Nixon campaign manager Jeb Stuart Magruder's testimony at the Watergate trial last January, Magruder informed him that he was going to commit perjury. Haldeman said his meeting with Magruder occurred after the trial. Moreover, Magruder said, "I don't recall any discussion of any particulars of the Watergate matter or the so-called cover-up" during that meeting. Had he been told about the perjury and other acts, Haldeman said, "I would have recalled them and I would have done something about them."

Haldeman admitted that he approved the hiring of Donald H. Segretti to operate as a "political prankster" in the mode of Democrat Dick Tuck, a man, Haldeman said, "who has been widely praised by political writers as a political prankster." Haldeman said he approved Segretti's hiring by two other White House aides with the "understanding he would engage in no illegal acts . . . I had no specific knowledge of Mr. Segretti's activities or how or with whom he acted," Haldeman said.

Haldeman denied asking CIA Director Richard

Helms and Deputy Director Gen. Vernon E. Walters to have the CIA "participate in any Watergate cover-up or to take the blame for the Watergate break-in."

Haldeman denied knowing that \$350,000 from a special White House fund was used to pay "hush money" to the Watergate burglary defendants. Since Dean was handling the transaction, Haldeman said, "I had no reason to question the legality or propriety" of the transfer to the Nixon re-election campaign for what Haldeman said was the legitimate payment of legal fees and family support for the Watergate defendants.

By the same token, Haldeman denied knowing about the Watergate break-in in advance, denied ever seeing the fruits of illegal wiretaps from the Democratic National Committee headquarters and denied ever telling his aide, Gordon Strachan, to make sure the "files are clean" following the break-in and the June 17 arrests of five men inside the Watergate. Strachan has testified that after talking to Haldeman he destroyed files containing plans for and possibly wiretap logs from the Watergate bugging.

The most significant part of Haldeman's testimony involved the charge by Dean in his Senate testimony on June 25 that Mr. Nixon had indicated as far back as Sept. 15, 1972, that he was aware of the cover-up.

Dean said he was called Sept. 15 to the White House Oval Office where he found Mr. Nixon and Haldeman "in very good spirits" following the news that seven men had been indicted by the federal Watergate grand jury and that the White House had not been implicated.

According to Dean: "The President then told me that Bob (Haldeman) had kept him posted on my handling of the Watergate case. The President told me I had done a good job and he appreciated how difficult a task it had been and the President was pleased that the case had stopped with Liddy." (G. Gordon Liddy was the former counsel to the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President and the highest ranking person to be indicted. He was sub-

sequently convicted along with the other six defendants.)

Dean said he told Mr. Nixon that he could not "take credit because others had done much more difficult things than I had done." Dean said he also warned Mr. Nixon "that I could make no assurance that the day would not come when this matter would start to unravel."

Dean said the meeting also ranged over a variety of topics, including the unresponsiveness to White House demands by the Internal Revenue Service, the upcoming attempts by the House Banking and Currency Committee to hold hearings on the Watergate affair, and the status of Watergate civil suits against the Republicans.

Dean said he told Mr. Nixon that Roemer McPhee, a lawyer for the Republican National Committee, was in contact with U.S. District Judge Charles R. Richey over the handling of the civil suits brought by the Democrats against the Nixon re-election committee and that Richey had indicated he would try to be helpful.

"I left the meeting," Dean testified, "with the impression that the President was well aware of what had been going on regarding the success of keeping the White House out of the Watergate scandal, and I also had expressed to him my concern that I was not confident that the cover-up could be maintained indefinitely."

Although agreeing with Dean on many of the details, Haldeman took strong exception to the interpretation Dean placed on what Mr. Nixon said. According to Haldeman, the President did not say, "Bob has told me what a good job you've been doing" and there was "no mood of exuberance on the part of the President."

Dean, Haldeman said, reassured Mr. Nixon that "nothing would come out that would surprise us" concerning the Watergate affair. Mr. Nixon, according to Haldeman, "did commend Dean for his whole handling of the Watergate matter, which was a perfectly natural thing for the President to do."

"I totally disagree,"

Haldeman said, "that President Nixon was aware of any type of cover-up and Mr. Dean did not advise him of any."

Concerning the March 21, 1973 meeting, the second meeting tape Haldeman said he had heard, Dean testified that he told Mr. Nixon what had happened in the Watergate affair, beginning with meetings held in Attorney General Mitchell's office and involving the payment of money to the Watergate defendants to buy their silence.

Dean also testified that a week earlier, on March 13, he had told Mr. Nixon of the money demands being made by the defendants and that it would take as much as \$1 million to keep them silent. Haldeman said he has not listened to the tape of that meeting, which Dean said Haldeman joined and heard the President say that raising \$1 million would be "no problem."

When Haldeman reached the account of the March 21 meeting in his statement yesterday, he told the Senate committee that he had been instructed by the White House not to disclose anything he had learned "solely by listening to a tape recording of such meeting." When committee chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) overruled invocation of executive privilege and ordered Haldeman to testify about what he had heard on the tape, Haldeman readily complied, inserting "an addendum" into his statement

Chief committee counsel Samuel Dash said after the hearing, "He was dying to give it to us."

Noting that he was present personally for only the final 40 minutes of Dean's meeting with Mr. Nixon on March 21, Haldeman gave in his "addendum" the following version "of the substance of that meeting to the best of my recollection":

"Dean reported some facts regarding the planning and the break-in (at the Watergate) and said again there were no White House personnel involved. He felt Magruder was fully aware of the operation, but he was not sure about Mitchell. He said that Liddy had given him a full rundown right after Watergate and that no one in the White House was involved. He said that his

only concerns regarding the White House were in relation to the Colson phone call to Magruder which might indicate White House pressure and the possibility that Haldeman got some of the "fruits" of the bugging via Strachan since he had been told the "fruits" had been supplied to Strachan . . .

"Regarding the post-June 17th situation, he (Dean) indicated concern about two problems, money and clemency. He said that Colson had said something to Hunt about clemency. He did not report any other offers of clemency although he felt the defendants expected it. The President confirmed that he could not offer clemency and Dean agreed.

"Regarding money, Dean said he and Haldeman were involved. There was a bad appearance which could be developed into a circumstantial chain of evidence regarding obstruction of justice. He said that Kalmbach had raised money for the defendants; that Haldeman had okayed the return of the \$350,000 to the (re-election committee; and that Dean had handled the dealings between the parties in doing this. He said that the money was for lawyers' fees.

"He also reported on a current Hunt blackmail threat. He said Hunt was demanding \$120,000 or else he would tell about the seamy things he had done for Ehrlichman. The President pursued this in considerable detail, obviously trying to smoke out what was really going on. He led Dean on regarding the process and

what he would recommend doing. He asked such things as—well, this is the thing you would recommend? we ought to do this? is that right? and he asked where the money would come from? how it would be delivered? and so so on. He asked how much money would be involved over the years and Dean said probably a million dollars—but the problem is that it is hard to raise. The President said there is no problem in raising a million dollars, we can do that, but it would be wrong. I have the clear impression that he was trying to find out what it was Dean was saying and what Dean was recommending. He as trying to get Dean's view and he was asking him leading questions in order to do that. This is the method the President often used when he was moving toward a determination.

"Dean also mentioned his concern about other activities getting out, such as the Ellsberg break-in, something regarding Brookings, the other Hunt activities for Colson on Chappaquiddick, the Segretti matter, use of Kalmbach funds, etc. . . .

"The meeting then turned to the question of how to deal with this situation and the President mentioned Ehrlichman's recommendation that everybody should go to the grand jury. The President told Dean to explore all of this with Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell.

"There was no discussion while I was in the room

(nor do I recall any discussion on the tape) on the question of clemency in the context of the President saying that he had discussed this with Ehrlichman and with Colson. The only mention of clemency was Dean's report that Colson had discussed clemency with Hunt and the President's statement that he could not offer clemency and Dean's agreement plus a comment that Dean thought the others expected it.

"Dean mentioned several times during this meeting his awareness that he was telling the President things the President had known nothing about.

"I have to surmise that there is a genuine confusion in Mr. Dean's mind as to what happened on March 13th versus what happened on March 21st, because some of what he describes in quite vivid detail as happening on March 13th did, in fact, happen on March 21st. The point about my laughing at his being more knowledgeable next time, and the question that he says he raised on March 13th regarding the million dollars are so accurately described, up to a point, as to what really happened on March 21st that I believe he is confused between the two dates.

"Mr. Dean's recollection that the President had told him on March 13 that Ehrlichman had discussed an offer of clemency to Hunt with him and he had also

discussed Hunt's clemency with Colson is at total variance with everything that I have ever heard from the President, Ehrlichman or Colson. I don't recall such a discussion in either the March 13 or the March 21 meeting.

"Now, to the question of impression. Mr. Dean drew the erroneous conclusion that the President was fully knowledgeable of the cover-up at the time of the March 13th meeting in the sense (1) of being aware that money had been paid for silence and that (2) the money demands could reach a million dollars and that the President said that was no problem. He drew his conclusion from a hypothetical discussion of questions since the President told me later that he had no intention to do anything whatever about money and had no knowledge of the so-called cover-up. I had no difficulty accepting the President's version, based on years of very close association with President Nixon and on hundreds of hours in meetings with him.

"Having observed the President over those years, in many different situations, it was very clear to me on March 21st that the President was exploring and probing; that he was surprised; that he was trying to find out what in the world was going on; he didn't understand how this all fit together and he was trying to find out."



Associated Press

H. R. (Bob) Haldeman is sworn in by Watergate committee chairman Sam Ervin.