

Text of Speech That Might Have Been

I wonder how it would have gone over? . . .

Ladies and gentlemen: The events surrounding the so-called Watergate case bring me once again to report to you directly.

Last August I told you that an investigation revealed that no one working on the White House staff was involved in any way in the Watergate case.

At that time other rumors were floating about suggesting that the White House was also involved in discreditable tactics involving the Democratic primaries.

On the basis of the disclaimers I made about Watergate you were entitled to assume that I was also denying any White House participation in, or knowledge of, these other tactics.

Later in the fall, at the height of the campaign, my press secretary Mr. Ziegler angrily denounced the Washington Post for suggesting that there was in fact a tie-in between Watergate and senior members of my staff.

Shortly after my inaugu-

ration, a Senate committee began to look into Watergate and later in March, a grand jury turned again to the subject after receiving testimony from one of the convicted burglars. During that period my staff had been instructed not to give testimony, on the grounds that principles were at stake involving the separation of powers.

I am reporting to you tonight to tell you that I have been consistently mistaken in my attitude toward this case.

The Executive Department is, numerically, the major department of government. There are over 2 million people on the payroll. In the White House there are 2,000 people. The Re-election Committee had thousands of employees.

But the fact of the matter is that I accepted the office of President because I was willing to take the responsibility of being the top man in this massive organization.

Now as President, I depend on aides who in turn depend on aides. The line of responsibility extends from me to the civil

servant hired yesterday to sweep the floors, and to the least volunteer in my political activities.

John Ehrlichman and Robert Haldeman have let me down. I say this with an overwhelming sense of sorrow, even as fathers are sometimes forced to say that their own sons have let them down.

This is not the time or the place to tell you about their strengths and their virtues. It is an ugly but perhaps necessary part of the human story that at any given moment society concentrates exclusively on a man's transgressions. Under the circumstances I have no alternative than sadly to dismiss Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman.

But theirs alone is not the blame. I am not your President because I am naive. I should far sooner than I did have suspected a complicity between White House staff members and the initiators of the Watergate conspiracy and other practices.

My own enthusiasm for my own election, my own contempt so frequently

expressed in public and in private for the lawlessness of some of those who opposed administration policy both during my administration and the previous administration, unquestionably transformed zeal into lawlessness.

There were signs all about me that I should have interpreted things I heard differently; that I was deeply wrong to attempt to discourage the elicitation of the truth.

I have, however, been elected President very recently and by a huge majority of the American people, and I will not trivialize that election, or disrupt the stability of the Constitution, or convulse this administration by any heroic gesture of resignation.

But I have earned humiliation. If after the Senate committee is done investigating this sad, sordid affair, the majority members of the Senate vote to censure me for my role in it, I shall accept that censure with a heavy heart, but with full respect for the integrity of my judges. Thank you, and goodnight.