

2 Reports of 1 Conversation

Transcript Versions Differ

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As the result of an apparent accident, the edited White House transcripts of presidential tape recordings contain two different versions of a portion of the same conversation.

Substantial differences in key words and phrases in the two versions ("President" in one; "press" in the other, for example), underscore the technical difficulties faced by the White House in transcribing the tapes and insuring the accuracy of the typescripts.

Late yesterday, in answer to inquiries by The Washington Post, the White House acknowledged that three pages of the transcripts contain two separate versions of the same conversation between President Nixon and Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen on April 16, 1973.

In addition to the confusion over the

words "President" and "press," the two versions include these other substantial differences: "Gray" (former FBI Director L. Patrick Gray) in one and "they" in the other; "you" in one and "we" in the other; "stick" and "still"; "bah" in one and "act" in the other. The first version of the segment in question contains 21 "inaudible" references while the second has 12.

The contrast between the two versions demonstrates the problems in making an accurate transcript. The House Judiciary Committee and the office of the special Watergate prosecutor have insisted that only the original tapes—and not edited transcripts—constitute acceptable evidence.

"We did the best we could," said deputy White House press secretary Gerald Warren, who confirmed that the two seg-

See TRANSCRIPT, A7, Col. 1

TRANSCRIPT, From A1

ments contain literally dozens of differences.

If the Judiciary Committee is not satisfied with the transcripts, Warren suggested, it could exercise President Nixon's offer to allow the Committee's chairman and ranking minority member to listen to the original tapes.

Both the Judiciary Committee and the office of special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski have subpoenaed White House tape recordings and have been told by the President that the edited transcripts—of fewer conversations than those sought—will have to suffice.

The tape of the April 16 meeting between Mr. Nixon and Petersen was one of those sought by subpoena of both the House and Jaworski, but was not turned over.

The existence of the two versions of the April 16 conversation caught two White House officials by surprise. "It kind of undercuts the argument that the transcripts will do the job doesn't it?" observed one source. (refer to Cohen)

In an introduction to the

edited transcripts, President Nixon said that "the attached transcripts represent the best efforts accurately to transcribe the material on the recorded tapes."

Last week, however, The Washington Post quoted a White House source as saying that the transcribing of the tapes "had to be a sloppy job . . . just the simple typing mistakes could change meanings."

A source familiar with the transcribing operation speculated yesterday that the discrepancy in the April 16 transcript was the result of at least a portion of the two-hour meeting being transcribed by two different typists.

Apparently both typists inadvertently went over at least some part of the same material, the source suggested, and came up with versions so dissimilar that they appeared to be different interchanges.

Then, the source added, the two versions were probably mistakenly tacked onto one another by someone assembling the full, edited transcript from sections compiled by different typists.

The portion of the April 16 conversation that is duplicated involves a discussion between the President and Assistant Attorney General Petersen about what public response Mr. Nixon should make to the developing Watergate scandal.

The first version begins on Page 857 of the edited transcripts published by the Government Printing Office. The second immediately follows at the bottom of Page 858. Both occupy slightly more than one full page of typescript.

Each version begins with slightly different language in a garbled paragraph spoken by Petersen. The conversation would appear to involve suggestions that U.S. Attorney Harold Titus talk to U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica about aspects of the Watergate case.

In the first version, the President replies as follows: "I don't think (inaudible) that's (inaudible)."

In the second version, the President's reply is transcribed as being totally inaudible.

Later in the first version, Petersen responds to one of the President's statements by saying, "No—no. Well."

In the second version, however, the quotation from Petersen is completely nonexistent and the conversation merely moves from one statement by the President to another by him.

The two versions suggest that the typists and editors of the transcripts did not always get the exact language of the participants and sometimes tried instead to get only the sense of the

For example, in the first version, Petersen at one point says: "I think it is." In the second, he says, "I understand it is." Though both "think" and "understand" have similar meanings, they do not sound alike.

The existence of the two versions of the Nixon-Petersen interchange was brought to the attention of two Washington Post reporters John B. Northrup, Huntington, N.Y. Northrup wrote a letter about the matter on Saturday, after reading the transcripts in the New York Times.

"I spent four days reading and analyzing the transcripts," Northrup said last night in a telephone interview. "It just jumped out at me as I was reading—the speech patterns. . . . I was reading and then said to myself that I've read that before and I just guess it was a fluke."

Staff members of the House Judiciary Committee

have already stated that the White House transcripts are less complete than transcripts the Committee has prepared. In those instances, Judiciary already possesses actual tape recordings surrendered by the White House to the special prosecutor's office, which in turn forwarded them to the House impeachment inquiry.

-16- 857

HP Well I think so. The meeting could (inaudible) seems to me is -- what about Klindienst? -- it's an expression of dissatisfaction on your part (inaudible).

P O that's right -- that's right. You've got to --

HP How do you handle it?

P (Inaudible) where he wants them to (inaudible). Get it done(?) and get it done today.

HP I'll call him.

P (Inaudible) out.

HP Oh I can't say he's with 'em. We're all outside in a storm.

P But this -- what's (inaudible) think of this?

HP Personally, (inaudible) well I've been (inaudible) and have advised the Jury of that fact and two that Gray, from what (inaudible) who has (inaudible) of the (inaudible) over there has to go in to see Sirica.

P I don't think (inaudible) that's (inaudible).

HP That's (inaudible). I don't think he will do anything unless (inaudible) in the current (inaudible) of proceeding he's in (inaudible). I can't conceive a point which of Titus and -- if there.

P This timing thing I think is terribly important you know,

-17- 858

HP I think it is.

P Can't have the President -- after all -- after all these months and what we've gone through and now once I have learned something of it I say "Bah."

HP No - no. Well

HP Better we.

HP I think we ought to talk of alternatives in general terms.

P We can't. No, the announcement -- what I had in mind would be (inaudible) announcement -- still to the (inaudible) going to name several other people who were involved. (inaudible) because of the people named (inaudible) language used.

HP (Inaudible) some people (inaudible) judgment (inaudible) matter for the President (inaudible) special, I'm going to call him special counsel (inaudible) this case (inaudible) possibility before he walks into that open court (inaudible) can't get to that today (inaudible) meeting with (inaudible)?

HP (Inaudible) question. (Inaudible) I told him one, I would be willing to go (inaudible) and advise his lawyers of that fact and two that they -- and by that I mean Titus who has the best relationship with Sirica over there -- is going to have to wait and see Sirica. Rh--

-18- 859

P (Inaudible)

HP That's a problem. That's a risk we would have to take.

HP I don't think he will. I don't think he will do anything unless it is in the context of a proceeding in his court. I can't conceive of him urging the (inaudible) of Titus and (inaudible).

P (Inaudible) timing on this is terribly important you know, because I understand it is

HP You can't have the press -- after all these months and what we have gone through and all. Once, I find something out -- I say -- ACT!

P Better we --

HP Well, I think we ought to talk of (inaudible) in more general terms, Mr. President.

P You can't. No -- the announcement -- what I had in mind would be -- the announcement -- stick to developments and if he's going to name -- several other people were involved (inaudible) other people -- then my concern -- were wrong and (inaudible) abuse and something has been charged. And that the President (inaudible) -- I'm going to tell them that the (inaudible) Counsel has resigned.

The solid and dotted lines show two versions of what the White House acknowledges is the same conversation between President Nixon and Henry Petersen.