

Nixon Tapes Release Plans To Be Issued

By Stephen Isaacs
Washington Post Staff Writer

The government will publish a comprehensive plan next week for releasing much of the contents of former President Nixon's tapes and papers to the public.

The plan, required under the Presidential Records and Materials Preservation Act that became law Dec. 19, will be submitted for congressional review on Wednesday.

Included in the plan, drawn up by the General Services Administration, will be a "special archivist" to oversee the dissemination of the materials, a person whom the GSA hopes will be an eminent historian or political scientist.

GSA's plan also includes a Presidential Materials Review Board, to consist of, mostly non-GSA experts, to decide questions of whether to disseminate or withhold certain tapes or documents.

That board's decisions, under the plan, will be binding upon the GSA administrator, unless he states his reasons for overturning them in writing.

Decisions will be appealable in the courts.

The GSA plans to set up an extensive Nixon documents operation at its Suitland center, the only place it has found in or around Washington where adequate space exists to store the materials, process them and provide research areas and listening centers for the public.

Access will be as broad as possible, according to GSA Administrator Arthur F. Sampson.

The biggest problem facing the GSA, Sampson says, is transcribing the approximately 5,000 hours of conversations recorded in the White House.

The reason that will be such a problem, Sampson says, is the poor quality of the recordings.

GSA audio specialists figure that it will take 250 man-hours to transcribe each hour of conversation on the 900 reels of tape.

The poor quality resulted from the crude recording machinery used and the placement of microphones and because of the slow speed at which the recordings were made—15/16ths of an inch per second.

Because of the difficulty hearing the voices on the tapes, the GSA plans to try

for near-perfect transcriptions on only those tapes relating to the abuse of presidential power, and will require only about a 60 per cent level of accuracy on non-key materials.

The GSA's mandate under the Dec. 19 law requires it to disseminate as quickly as possible all materials relating to the abuse of power during the Nixon years, and so it feels its first task—once and if court challenges to the law are dispensed with—will be the tapes.

The GSA plans to keep the original recordings intact, and to re-record them on two different reels—one to contain material of a personal, national security or like nature that will not be made public, and the other to contain material that will be made public.

The public tapes will then be duplicated again and sent out to the GSA's 11 centers around the country.

The plan then sets up the various review boards to decide what properly should be made public.

Meanwhile, the 900 tapes and 42 million Nixon-era documents have been frozen in place by court orders.

The special prosecutor's office has some tapes, and 888 of them are under Secret Service custody in two five-drawer and one four-drawer safes in a "secure" room in the Old Executive Office Building adjoining the White House, according to White House spokesman Larry Speakes.

Speakes said that access is granted only by written memoranda from White House counsel Philip W. Buchen to the director of the Secret Service.

Access is granted only with regard to requests "pursuant to subpoenas, court orders and other legal purposes," Speakes said, as required by U.S. District Court Judge Charles R. Richey last October.

Speakes said that Judge Richey and the special prosecutor's office have approved the security arrangements for the tapes, and when originals are played, they are played only on machines where the "erase and record function has been disabled."

GSA audio experts say the original recordings can last for up to 100 years under optimum conditions and should be re-wound every two years or so to adjust the tension.