tative Jack Flynt: "I can understand, after having read them, why he didn't want to release the transcripts." Added Representative John Brademas of Indiana: "There was an extraordinary moral obtuseness on the part of these people. It seems to me—subject to the work of the Judiciary Committee—that there is a clear possibility of criminality by the President. The hush money is the symbol of it."

While most Democrats regarded impeachment or resignation as an inevitability that they were bound to support, Republicans were still anguishing about how to ride the wave that was swamping them. Scarcely a Republican could be found to disagree with a remark last week by Connecticut Senator Lowell Weicker: "I think the party has no obligation whatever to defend the President." But they had not yet agreed on any concerted plan of action, such as going to the President and telling him to step down. Less patient outsiders have wondered why the Republicans have not summoned their courage and marched on the White House to demand the President's resignation. But the Republicans are too sensitive to both the winds of politics and the constitutional separation of powers to take any action that might drastically tip the scales of Government. The most they would do is take a head count on impeachment in both houses and submit their findings to the President. "I don't know what to do," said a top congressional leader. "I pray a lot." He meant it.

"Razor's Edge." But Republicans are generally agreed on what they would like the President to do on his own: resign. As they gathered in anxious huddles last week, as their mail piled up from angry constituents, they recognized that the President's troubles were also their own. The longer he clings to office, the harder it will be for them to win re-election in the fall. "We're on the razor's edge," said a Mid-Atlantic G.O.P. Congressman. "These are the facts of life." In the meantime, many Republicans feared that the President's delaying tactics were only making life more difficult for him. By attempting to drive a wedge between Democrats and Republicans on the Hill, the President's attorney James St. Clair may actually be thrusting them closer together. "I feel he's losing us," said a top-ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee. "I think he's only trying to save his client. I don't think he gives a damn about the Republican Party."

Republican officeholders, of course, do care about their party—and last week more desperately than ever. For that reason, perhaps above any other practical one, the President's days in office seemed numbered. "Over the weekend, there are going to be some decisions made," said a top Republican congressional leader. "People are going to be thinking about things. I don't know what the decisions will be. I have the monkey on my shoulder, no doubt about it."

WATERGATE/COVER STORIES

Further Tales from the Transcripts

THE PRESIDENT: 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. [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]?

HENRY PETERSEN: [Inaudible] question. [Inaudible] I told him ... I would be willing to go [inaudible] ...

THE PRESIDENT: [Inaudible]

That kind of dialogue might be a hit in the theater of the absurd, but it hardly seems the stuff of popular success. Yet even though the White House transcripts of taped presidential conversations are shot through with such passages as that one between the President and the Assistant Attorney General on April 16, 1973, they have become the nation's newest bestseller and biggest conversation piece. With good reason.

To be sure, these 33 hours or so of recorded talks are a minuscule fraction of Richard Nixon's presidential conversations—and, one can only hope, the grubbiest fraction. The transcripts might not necessarily be representative of the way he always conducts business; the language and tone may be loftier and more dignified when he confers with, say, Henry Kissinger or other officials. Despite the indecipherable passages and inelegant language, however, the transcripts yield an absorbing insight into the inner workings of Nixon's White House and of the President's mind. Some noteworthy examples follow.

I: THE MAIN THING IS [INAUDIBLE] AND [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

The version issued by the Government Printing Office runs to 1,308 pages and contains some 1,700 notations of "unintelligible" or "inaudible." They are not, however, randomly distributed. An extraordinary number occur at crucial points in conversations; a remarkable total, perhaps two-thirds, are gaps in the President's conversation. In a meeting with then White House Counsel John Dean III in the Oval Office on Feb. 28, 1973, for example, the President (P) is discussing how to handle the newly established Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities—the Watergate committee.

P: Make a deal—that is the point. Baker [Senator Howard Baker], as I said, is going to keep at arm's length and you've got to be very firm with these guys or you may not end up with many things. Now as I said the only back-up position I can possibly see is one of a [inaudible] if Kleindienst [Richard Klein-

NIXON & MITCHELL WITH ROSE GARDEN IN BACKGROUND IN 1971

FRED MAROON-LOUIS MERCIER

P: Well, one hell of a lot of people don't give one damn about this issue of the suppression of the press, etc. We know that we aren't trying to do it. They all squeal about it . . . [White House Special Counsel Charles] Colson sure making them move it around, saying we don't like this or that and [inaudible]

D: Well, you know Colson's threat of a law suit . . . had a very sobering effect on several of the national magazines. They are now checking before printing a lot of this Watergate junk they print. They check the press office trying to get a confirmation or denial, or call the individuals involved. And they have said they are doing it because they are afraid of a libel suit on them. So it did have a sobering effect. We will keep them honest if we can remind them that they can't print anything and get away with it.

Nor does Nixon think much of the motives of the press. Still conferring with Dean, he makes the point that Senator Sam Ervin's Watergate committee ought to conduct itself as if it were a court of law.

P: There will be no hearsay, no innuendo. This will be a model of a Congressional hearing. That will disappoint the [adjective deleted] press. No hearsay! No innuendo! No leaks!

IV: THE BIG ENCHILADA

The transcripts are sprinkled with subplots: the increasingly sinister aura surrounding the absent and feared Chuck Colson; the bizarre conduct of Convicted Watergate Burglar G. Gordon Liddy, who never broke his silence and who deliberately burned his arms while in prison to prove that he could endure anything; the delicate compromising of Henry Petersen. Perhaps most striking is the story of how Nixon progresses from disbelief that John Mitchell is involved in the scandal to an unseemly eagerness to turn his longtime friend, confidant, law partner and campaign manager into the chief scapegoat, and how, through it all, the President is unable to confront Mitchell directly.

As late as Feb. 28, 1973, Nixon tells Dean, during a conversation on Senator Baker's role on the Ervin committee: "Baker's got to realize . . . that if he allows this thing to get out of hand he is going to potentially ruin John Mitchell. He won't. Mitchell won't allow himself to be ruined. He will put on his big stone face." By March 27, Nixon and his chief aides have become aware that Mitchell is in deep trouble over Watergate. This exchange takes place among Nixon, Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

P: Mitchell, you see, is never never going to go in and admit perjury . . .

H: They won't give him that convenience, I wouldn't think, unless they figure they are going to get you. He is as high up as they've got.

E: He's the big enchilada.

H: And he's the one the magazines zeroed in on this weekend.

P: They did? What grounds?

H: Yeah. [unintelligible] has a quote that they maybe have a big fish on the hook.

P: I think Mitchell should come down.

As of April 14, however, Mitchell has not yet been summoned to Washington from New York City. Nixon, Ehrlichman and Haldeman agree that somebody had better talk with him.

E: The purpose of the mission is to go up and bring him to a focus on this: The jig is up. And the President strongly feels that the only way that this thing can end up being even a little net plus for the Administration and for the Presidency and preserve some thread is for you to go in and voluntarily make a statement.

P: A statement [unintelligible]

E: A statement that basically says . . . "I am both morally and legally responsible."

P: Yeah.

Later during the meeting Ehrlichman suggests that the President summon Mitchell to the Oval Office "as the provable wrong-doer" and tell him: "My God, I've got a report here. And it's clear from this report that you are guilty as hell. Now, John, for [expletive deleted] sake go on in there and do what you should. And let's get this thing cleared up and get it off the country's back and move on." Haldeman is enthusiastic about that scenario. "That's the only way to beat it now," he says. By then Nixon is in agreement, but he does not want to give Mitchell the word himself. "Mitchell—this is going to break him up," he says. "You know it's a pain for me to do it." He delegates the job to Ehrlichman and, referring to himself in the third person, gives him these instructions: "You could say to Mitchell . . . that he just can't bring himself to talk to you about it. Just can't do it."

It soon becomes clear that Mitchell is not about to shoulder the blame and is, in fact, as adept at shifting it as are his quondam colleagues.

E: Well, let me tell you what Mitchell said. It was another gigging of the White House. He said, "You know, . . . [Deputy Director of Nixon's Re-election Campaign Jeb] Magruder said that Haldeman had cooked this whole thing up over here at the White House and—

P: Had he said that?

E: Well that is what he said . . . Mitchell's theory—

P: Whatever his theory is, let me say, one footnote—is that throwing off on the White House won't help him one damn bit.

Before the week is out, Kleindienst is advising the President that Mitchell is certain to be indicted. The "big fish" has been hooked, and Nixon, Ehrlichman and Haldeman mistakenly assume that the Watergate probers will be satisfied and will quit casting for even bigger ones.

WALTER BENNETT

KISSINGER & HAIG AT WHITE HOUSE
Henry had a solution in mind.

V: THE TOUCHIEST TAPES

The two tapes that may figure most heavily in any effort to impeach the President are those of March 21 and 27, 1973. TIME has learned that it was the March 21 tape of an Oval Office meeting of Nixon, Dean and Haldeman that prompted the Watergate grand jury to recommend the President's indictment for conspiracy. Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski dissuaded the jurors, arguing that it was questionable whether an incumbent President can in fact be indicted, that the recourse against a President is impeachment. Jaworski also warned that if the Supreme Court were to rule that the grand jury had exceeded its authority in going after the President, indictments of seven other officials might

be jeopardized. The 23 jurors were particularly impressed by the President's apparent failure to rule out the payment of hush money to the Watergate burglars. At one point Nixon told Dean, "Get it," and investigators later confirmed that $75,000 was delivered that very night to the lawyer for E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of those convicted of staging the break-in. Also, the jurors were convinced that the President's statement, "It would be wrong, that's for sure," did not refer to the payment of bribes. In context, the statement appears to refer to the granting of clemency —and to have been made out of political, not moral, considerations.

Moreover, tape experts hope to determine whether portions of the March 13 tape of a meeting between Nixon and Dean were cut out and spliced into the March 21 tape. The investigators are aware that what Dean said was discussed on March 13 actually came up on the March 21 tape; Dean later conceded that he had probably got the two conversations mixed up. A few—but not all—of the Watergate investigators wonder whether the tapes were doctored in order to establish a later date for the President's learning of the Watergate cover-up. One reason for their suspicion: all through the Watergate hearings, it was believed that the final payment of hush money was made on March 20; had the President not learned of the cover-up until March 21, he could not possibly have approved the final payment. Not until recently was it established that the last installment was actually paid on March 21.

The March 27 transcript raises questions about Haldeman's role in the campaign intelligence setup run by Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy. Haldeman tells the President on that date that one of his aides "believes . . . that the whole Liddy plan, the whole super-security operation, super-intelligence operation was put together by the White House, by Haldeman, Dean and others. Liddy, Dean cooked the whole thing up at Haldeman's instructions . . . Now there is some semblance of, some validity to the point, that I did talk, not with Dean but with Mitchell, about the need for intelligence activity." Haldeman concedes that the plan was put into action only after Haldeman Aide Gordon Strachan relayed word to Mitchell that "the President wants it done and there is to be no more arguing about it." Mitchell's response was, "O.K., if they say to do it, go ahead."

VI: KEEPING HENRY CURRENT

The name Henry Kissinger surfaced only rarely and obliquely during the entire Watergate affair. Yet Kissinger did not operate in isolation from the rest of the White House. On April 16, 1973, there is this exchange between the President and Haldeman:

P: Have you filled Henry in, Bob?
H: Nope.
P: You haven't? He's got enough problems in Laos. I haven't. Somebody else—he seems to know of it.
H: Well, Garment [then White House Special Consultant Leonard Garment] took it upon himself to go meet with Henry and Al Haig [then Kissinger's assistant, later Haldeman's successor as White House chief of staff] to discuss his [Garment's] concern about the whole situation, apparently.
P: What the hell did he do that for?
H: On the basis that he thought there was a real danger and threat to the Presidency.

Aware that the Watergate scandal was becoming a threat to the presidency itself as well as to Nixon, Garment sought the support of Haig and Kissinger in his attempt to persuade the President that Haldeman and Ehrlichman would have to leave the Administration to save the President. It is not clear whether Kissinger supported the proposal. His global perspective and his concern that a weakened President would lead to international difficulties, however, led him to agree with Garment on another matter:

H: I think Len's view is that what you need is a bold, new, you know, really some kind of a dramatic move. Henry feels that, but Henry feels that you should go on television.
P: I know, 9 o'clock.
H: Which is his solution to any problem.
P: Do you believe I should do the 9 o'clock news?
H: On this, no.
P: I don't think so either.
H: I said, we are all steeped in this, but look at the newspaper. Where is Watergate today?
P: Well in the country it is not that big.

VII: ALL THE KING'S HORSES

The White House transcripts show that Richard Nixon displayed a proprietary attitude toward the many agencies and bureaus of the U.S. Government. They were his to use as he saw fit. Items:

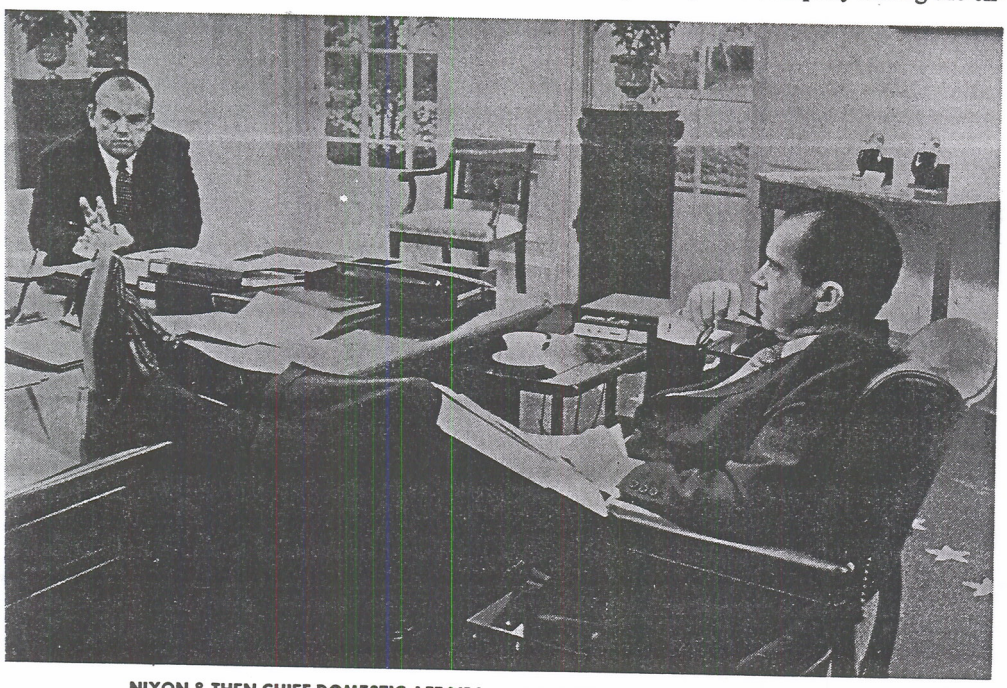
▶ In a discussion with Dean on September 15, 1972, about Democratic Nominee George McGovern's presidential campaign finances, this exchange took place:

P: I don't think he is getting a hell of a lot of small money . . . Have you had the P.O. [Post Office] checked yet?
D: That is John's [Ehrlichman's] area. I don't know.
P: Well, let's have it checked.

▶ Talking on the same day with Dean about "all those who tried to do us in," Nixon said: "They are asking for it and they are going to get it. We have not used the power in this first four years as you know . . . We have not used the Bureau [FBI] and we have not used the Justice Department but things are going to change now."

▶ In a March 13, 1973, talk with Dean, the topic turned again to alleged irregularities in McGovern's campaign finances.

P: Do you need any IRS stuff?
D: There is no need at this hour for anything from IRS and we have a couple of sources over there that I can go to . . . We can get right in and get what we need.



NIXON & THEN CHIEF DOMESTIC AFFAIRS ADVISER EHRLICHMAN IN OVAL OFFICE
A big fish was hooked, but the probers were after even bigger ones.