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THE HORS D'OEUVRE

WASHINGTON.

For one who has read the sordid record of orchestrated crookedness and planned double-cross in the White House Oval Office, it is neither surprising nor shocking that the White House has launched a conscienceless campaign to destroy John Dean's credibility as a witness.

Even the sanitized version of the White House transcripts makes it clear that from the moment the Watergate burglars were arrested until today, the only thing which has mattered to Richard Nixon was saving Richard Nixon—or "isolating the Presidency" from the stench, to use one of his favorite expressions.

But the campaign to destroy Dean is laughable. It is just another bit of the stupidity that flows from desperation, because the transcripts simply will not permit Nixon to pawn Dean off as the villain, the culprit.

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Mind you, the transcripts make it clear that John Dean is no saint. The record shows that when the Oval Office was full of plotters looking for scapegoats, scheming as to how to obstruct justice, Dean's mind raced to crookedness as fast as anyone's.

But the record also shows beyond doubt that Dean started out trying to save the President from a coverup. In an incredible discussion on April 14, 1973, Nixon tells his two top aides, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, that his ex-campaign manager and former Attorney General, John

Mitchell, must come in and confess and become the Watergate fall guy. Then the President says he has made up his mind also to throw Dean to the wolves.

When Ehrlichman questions the wisdom of firing Dean, Nixon then voices his own feelings about Dean.

"Dean is not like Mitchell in the sense that Dean only tried to do what he could to pick up the pieces and everybody else around here knew it had to be done," the President said.

Nixon agonized for a few more minutes over the morality of firing Dean, then settles on this bit of wisdom: "Give 'em an hors d'oeuvre and maybe they won't come back for the main course. Well, out, John Dean."

Little did he dream at the time that he'd have to give 'em two more hors d'oeuvres, namely Haldeman and Ehrlichman, to keep them away from the "main course," which is Richard Nixon.

The transcripts show shrewd John Dean concluding early that Nixon and his two top aides wanted to make Dean the sacrificial lamb. So Dean turned on them and now stands to be a very damaging witness against the President in impeachment hearings.

So the White House struggles laboriously to convince the public that Dean "misspoke" numerous times in his Watergate committee testimony. They cite as an egregious error Dean's assertion that the President never asked him for a written report about Watergate.

A March 22, 1973, transcript shows clearly that the President asked Dean to go to Camp David. "Completely

away from the phone . . . I want a written report."

So on the face of things Dean either lied or suffered a lapse of memory.

But then, go back to the transcript of two days earlier when the President had a 14-minute telephone conversation with Dean. You find the President urging Dean to produce a phony written report that could be used to reassure Republicans, deceive the press and frustrate Congressional investigators.

In looking for a way to make "executive privilege" salable, the President says:

"You've got to have something where it doesn't appear that I am doing this in, you know, just in a—saying to hell with the Congress and to hell with the people, we are not going to tell you anything because of executive privilege. That, they don't understand. But if you say, 'No, we are willing to cooperate,' and you've made a complete statement, but make it very incomplete. See, this is what I mean. I don't want a, too much in chapter and verse."

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The President never asked Dean for more than a phony report. And the March 22 transcript makes it clear this spurious document was to shield Nixon. Ehrlichman says to the President: "And I am looking to the future, assuming that some corner of this thing comes unstuck, you are in a position to say, 'Look, that document I published is the document I relied on, that is, the report I relied on.'"

John Dean made a few mistakes as to dates and other recollections. But the transcripts document his accuracy and truthfulness to an incredible degree. That the White House works so desperately to discredit Dean suggests that the coverup continues and a cancer still surrounds the Presidency.