

Nixon on Subpeonas: 'I Refuse

Following is the text of President Nixon's letter to Chief U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica refusing to turn over White House tape recordings to the grand jury:

Dear Judge Sirica:

White House counsel have received on my behalf a subpoena duces tecum issued out of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia on July 23 at the request of Archibald Cox. The subpoena calls on me to produce for a grand jury certain tape recordings as well as certain specified documents. With the utmost respect for the court of which you are chief judge, and for the branch of government of which it is a part, I must decline to obey the command of that subpoena. In doing so I follow the example of a long line of my predecessors as President of the United States who have consistently adhered to the position that the President is not subject to compulsory process from the courts.

The independence of the three branches of our government is at the very heart of our constitutional system. It would be wholly inadmissible for the President to seek to compel some particular action by the courts. It is equally inadmissible for the courts to seek to compel some particular action from the President.

That the President is not subject to compulsory process from the other branches of government does not mean, of course, that all information in the custody of the President must forever remain unavailable to the courts. Like all of my predecessors, I have always made relevant material available to the courts except in those rare instances when to do so would be inconsistent with the public interest. The principle that guides my actions in this regard was well stated by Attorney General Speed in 1865:

Upon principles of public policy there are some kinds of evidence which the law excludes or dispenses with . . . The official transactions between the heads of departments of the government and their subordinate officers are, in general, treated as "privileged communications." The President of the United States, the heads of the great departments of the government, and the governors of the several states, it has been decided, are not bound to produce papers or disclose information communicated to them where, in their own judgment, the disclosure would, on public considerations, be inexpedient. These are familiar rules laid down by every author on the law of evidence.

A similar principle has been stated by many other attorneys general, it has been recognized by the courts, and it has been acted upon by many Presidents.

In the light of that principle, I am voluntarily transmitting for the use of the grand jury the memorandum from W. Richard Howard to Bruce Kehrli in which they are interested as well as the described memoranda from Gordon Strachan to H. R. Haldeman. I have concluded, however, that it would be inconsistent with the public interest and with the constitutional position of the presidency to make available recordings of meetings and telephone conversations in which I was a participant and I must respectfully decline to do so.

Sincerely,

RICHARD NIXON.

to Obey the Command...