

Nixon Said Pardons Would Be Arranged, April 14, '73, Watergate Tape Discloses

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WASHINGTON — Former President

Nixon told his top aides in April 1973 that "full pardons" would be arranged for Watergate figures before the end of his term of office.

That promise, along with one other comment on executive clemency, was left out of the White House transcript of an April 14, 1973, conversation released last spring. But it was disclosed yesterday when the actual tape was played for the jury in the Watergate cover-up trial.

The very fact that the items were deleted by the White House contributes to the growing impression that promises of clemency were a bigger part of the Watergate cover-up than previously thought. Until this week the primary ingredient of the cover-up had appeared to be the payments of "hush money" to the defendants in the June 1972 break-in at Democratic headquarters in the Watergate office building here.

In the tape played yesterday that was transcribed by the special Watergate prosecutor's office Mr. Nixon is heard making the following statement to aides H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, both defendants in the current cover-up trial:

"(Unintelligible) are in this thing. It would be my (tape noise) a reasonable time had expired after the thing (unintelligible, with tape noise) and before I leave office and they'll get off. You get them full pardons. That's what they have to have, John."

It isn't discernible from the context just which Watergate figures would be the recipients of pardons, but it is clear that the topic of discussion is Watergate. The statement comes near the end of approximately two typewritten pages in the prosecutors' transcript containing material that, in the White House version, was labeled "(material unrelated to presidential actions deleted)." The rest of the deleted section was largely de-

voted to a digression about a Senate Watergate Committee staff member.

Later in that same conversation the White House transcript shows Mr. Ehrlichman's response as "(unintelligible)" when Mr. Nixon, speaking of hush money and clemency for Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt, asked, "How do you handle the problem of clemency, John?"

Actually, the tape discloses, Mr. Ehrlichman replied: "You'd have to stonewall that—it's, it's, it's—a cold fact, cold denial (unintelligible)."

A Jan. 8, 1973, tape played in court on Monday, which hadn't been released at all by the White House, had disclosed that Mr. Nixon decided he could build a case for granting clemency for Hunt, whose wife had died in a plane crash, and that Hunt was the only one of the original defendants likely to incriminate higher-ups.

The newly disclosed references to clemency add some significance to other vague discussions of the subject scattered throughout the previously published transcripts. For instance, toward the end of the April 14 conversation Mr. Nixon suggested that Mr. Ehrlichman give the following message to campaign aide Jeb Stuart Magruder:

"Jeb, let me just start here by telling you the President's own great affection for you and for your family—real affection—my mind was thinking last night of his poor little kids in school. . . ." Mr. Nixon explained: "I'd just put that in so that he knows that I have a personal affection. That's the way to, that's the way the so-called clemency's got to be handled. Do you see, John?"

"I understand," Mr. Ehrlichman replied.

"Do the same thing with (former Attorney General and Nixon campaign director John) Mitchell," suggested Mr. Haldeman.