

White House Nightmare: Button

By Art Buchwald

My good friend William Safire is a very rare bird in Washington. He is the only columnist in town who still is willing to defend his old boss Richard Nixon. Last week Mr. Safire raged at all the Nixon-haters for snickering at the story in the Woodward and Bernstein book when President Nixon asked Henry Kissinger to get down on his knees and pray with him. Then the President broke down in tears and cried like a baby.

Mr. Safire, who constantly points out the excesses of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson to show that Mr. Nixon was guilty of no more wrongdoing, accused the Georgetown set of ascribing the praying and crying of Nixon to mental instability.

As spokesman for the Georgetown set, I wish to assure Safire that not one person in the area snickered when they read the story. The reason was, according to Woodward and Bernstein, Mr. Nixon had not only

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been praying and crying — he had also been drinking. It is perfectly all right with the Georgetown set for a President to pray, even with Henry Kissinger. But it's another thing for the President of the United States to drown his sorrows in booze.

The reason is obvious. The President of the United States, as everyone is aware, has his finger on the button.

The fear of all of us was that a drunk President might decide in his stupor that if he had to go, he was going to take Georgetown with him.

We had a nightmare of Mr. Nixon staggering through the White House mumbling, "Where's the button? Gotta push the button. I'll show those (expletives) that they can't push the President of the United States around. Pat, where's the button?"

"I hid it. Go to bed, Richard."

"You had no right to hide the button. It's my button and I can push it if I want to."

"Please, Richard, You've had too much to drink. I'll tell you where the button is in the morning."

"I want to know where it is now. As

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commander-in-chief, I order you to tell me where the button is. If you refuse, I'll have to assume you're one of them."

"Please, Richard. Tell me again about China."

"Don't want to talk about China. I want a drink, and then I'm going to find the button."

"Richard, will you stop throwing all my clothes out of the drawers! It's not in any of them. I didn't hide the button in the medicine cabinet either . . . No, it's not under the bed. Now why don't you go to sleep?"

"It's gotta be somewhere in this house. I'll bet you Al Haig knows where the button is . . . Operator, get me Haig . . . Al, you have any idea where Pat hid the button? . . . Yeah,

that button . . . What do you mean why do I want to know? . . . Don't argue with me . . . Where the hell is it? . . . You don't know? . . . Well, is there another button around? . . . There's only one? . . . Dammit, there should be a spare one . . . Suppose it got lost or something. Al, the first thing I want you to do tomorrow morning is put a button in every room in the White House . . . When I want to push it, I don't want to have to go looking all over for it . . . You wanna come up and have a drink with me? . . . Ah, you're no fun. I don't know why I keep you around.

"Operator, get me Kissinger. Henry, you got any idea where Pat hid the button? . . . You don't huh? . . . Well, I think you're lying. As a matter of fact,

I know you're lying . . . I want to tell you something, Henry. I don't like you. I never liked you. I don't like any Krauts and when I find that button and push it, you're going to be the first to go . . . I don't care if you prayed with me or not, you got no guts. If you did you'd help me find the button . . ."

It probably didn't happen this way, but I have to tell you, Safire, that's what we in Georgetown thought was going on in those last days and that is why we aren't snickering now. We were scared stiff!

As President Ulysses S. Grant once said at a party in Georgetown, "An administration that prays together stays together—but one that drinks together sinks together."

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