

Public figures stunned at disclosure of tape recording

Some Say They Don't Mind

By Lou Cannon
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Public figures ranging from George Meany to George Romney reacted with incredulity yesterday to testimony that President Nixon had tape-recorded conversations and telephone calls without consent.

Present Nixon administration Cabinet members, while refraining from direct criticism of the President, said to a man that they didn't know their conversations were being recorded.

"No kidding," said former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst in a voice of astonishment.

Kleindienst, reached at a hotel in London where he is on a business trip, said he was not aware of the practice and would "have no further comment on it . . . because of my personal relationship with the President."

"I'm literally astonished, I'm incredulous," said Robert H. Finch, longtime

Nixon confidant and a former White House counselor and Health, Education and Welfare Secretary. "I remember being told by several sources that Lyndon Johnson had an arrangement like that but it had been discontinued. I assumed that was the case."

Former Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel, who was dismissed by the President after publicly protesting the administration's Vietnam policies, said that "America will be sick at heart" over the disclosures and added:

"I was trying to get my message to the White House anyway. All they had to do was ask."

Another ex-Cabinet member, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Romney, said that "from a historical standpoint" he was pleased that his views were recorded but had

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Goldwater told the President this at the time, the spokesman said, adding that the source of the story must be a very well-placed leak.

Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) the 1972 Democratic presidential candidate called the practice "a violation on privacy." Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), the Republican national chairman during the 1972 campaign, said that he also had not known of the recordings but joked, "I'm glad I always nodded when talking to the President."

On the House side, Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) said "that if this kind of thing did go on it was an



ROBERT H. FINCH
... "I'm astonished"

outrage, almost beyond belief."

Minority Leader Gerald Ford (R-Mich.) issued a statement in which he said he was never aware of the tape recordings but didn't have any objections.

"I have never said anything to any President that could not be a matter of public record," Ford said. "I, personally, therefore, see nothing wrong with the practice."

Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania said he didn't know about the recordings "but always assumed, as far as phone calls are concerned, that there must be some method of keeping a record."



CARL ALBERT
... "it was an outrage"

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never suspected that this was the case.

"I had some things to say I thought needed saying," said Romney. "They weren't always listened to, but I'm glad they were recorded. I hope they don't get edited."

AFL-CIO President Meany, a White House guest on several occasions, said he did not have "the slightest idea" that any of his conversations were recorded. Referring to the testimony of former White House aide Alexander P. Butterfield, Meany said:

"If this man were not testifying under oath, I would not believe it, because it is so fantastic as to be almost beyond belief. God bless the blunderers at Watergate. If they hadn't been so clumsy, America would never have known about things like this."

Democratic leaders in the Congress were critical of the recordings, though most said they would not have objected if they had been told in advance.

"I'm not surprised but I don't like it," said Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana. "I wouldn't have minded if they told me."

The member of congress



GERALD FORD
... "I see nothing wrong"

who seemed least surprised of all was Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), who said through a spokesman that he regarded recording conversations for historical purposes as appropriate but believes that people who are being recorded should be notified in advance.

The spokesman said Goldwater was not surprised "for a very strange reason . . . One conversation he had in the Oval Office was reported so precisely by Jack Anderson that he felt there had to be a recording device in operation at the time; there was not a comma out of place."

Housing and Urban Development Secretary James T. Lynn, said he didn't know that his conversations with the President were being taped but added:

"That doesn't bother me a bit."

Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton and Health Education and Welfare Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger said they hadn't been aware of the practice but declined further comment. Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz and William D. Ruckelshaus, former Environmental Protection Agency administrator and former acting director of the FBI, declined comment.



RICHARD G. KLEINDIENST
... "no kidding"

A close friend of the late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover said "for sure" that Hoover had not known of the practice.

And a spokesman for Charles Colson, the former controversial special counsel for President Nixon, said that Colson also hadn't known about the recordings.

In responding to the Butterfield disclosure, Finch said that "those of us who were present at various meetings were asked to jot down our notes and get them into the central files for the presidential records."

"I assumed this would have fulfilled any historical



GEORGE ROMNEY
... "but I'm glad"

requirements," Finch added.
 "I'm quite surprised."
 Herbert C. Klein, the departing communications director for the Nixon administration, said that he had not been aware of the recordings and agreed that "most people assumed" that history was preserved by the note-taking.

However, Klein said the Butterfield testimony "basically indicates that the major interest was to preserve the history of the presidency."

In Hickel's view this view of history will not be a fair one to the people who didn't know they were being taped recorded.



GEORGE MEANY
 ... "almost beyond belief"

"If one person knows the conversation is being taped, he's speaking for history and self-protection," Hickel said. "The other person should know it as a matter of self-protection."

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.) believes that the party being taped also should know about it for reasons of language.

"I'd have appreciated it if he'd have let me know ahead of time," said Mills. "My English would have been better."



WALTER J. HICKEL
 ... "my message ... anyway"

Staff writers Sanford J. Ungar and Peter Milius contributed to this report.