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# Nixon Held Tapes Over Advice Of Laird, Harlow, Rep. Ford Says

By Lou Cannon

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House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan said yesterday that President Nixon had withheld the tapes recordings of his White House conversations against the advice of two of his chief counselors, Melvin R. Laird and Bryce Harlow.

Ford said that Laird had told him that the President spent 10 to 12 hours listening to the tapes before reaching his decision not to release them. Neither Ford nor Harlow had heard the tapes, Ford added.

Unless Mr. Nixon makes at least selective portions of the tapes available, Ford

said, many Americans always will feel "nagging doubt" about the President's role in the Watergate cover-up.

Ford's disclosures came at a breakfast meeting during which the Michigan congressman expressed his personal confidence that the President did not have prior knowledge of the Watergate burglary or of the subsequent cover-up of White House officials.

But while the President, in Ford's view, is on "good ground" legally in his decision to withhold the tapes, "politically it was not a good move."

"His decision on the tapes,

if the mail is a reflection, has hurt the President," Ford said.

Ford took a leading role in urging that Laird, Mr. Nixon's first secretary of Defense, be brought back to the Nixon administration, principally to improve White House relations with an increasingly skeptical Congress. Ford said he had also suggested the hiring of Harlow, a veteran counselor from the Eisenhower era, who also served in Mr. Nixon's first term, as an alternative to Laird, never believing that Mr. Nixon would bring both men back into government.

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## FORD, From A1

However, there have been increasing reports from inside the White House that neither Laird nor Harlow have been especially influential in advising the President. When a reporter mentioned this to Ford, the congressman smiled and said:

"They can't expect to win them all."

Ford did not name any advisers who opposed release of the tapes or portions of the tapes, except for Charles A. Wright, a White House legal consultant who is expected to argue the Nixon case in court.

However, Ford suggested that the President had reached the decision very much on his own after weighing the legal arguments and the advice of his counselors and after listening to the tapes.

Laird met with reporters at the White House on Thursday, partly in an attempt to dispel reports that he was dissatisfied and would leave the administration only a month after he returned to it.

In that meeting Laird declined to disclose his recommendations to the President but said he had made them in a "face-to-face" meeting with Mr. Nixon.

The former Defense Secretary said that Mr. Nixon "came down very strongly, based upon the constitutional question and the legal question, on the protection of the presidency of the United States. Rather than taking the short-term view, he took the long-term view in making his decisions."

Responding to persistent reports that he and Harlow, like John Connally before them, had been ignored by the President and had little personal access to them, Laird said there was "a misunderstanding" of his role.

"I did not come over here to become involved with the problems in connection with Watergate," Laird said. "... I felt that there were other problems that were important as far as the country was concerned and I was going to direct my attention to those problems."

Ford credited Laird with engineering the compromise between Congress and the administration that is supposed to end U.S. bombing of Cambodia on Aug. 15. He also said that he is hopeful that Laird can work out compromises that will enable the House to pass special revenue-sharing measures on education and community development after Congress returns from its August recess.

But on the central issue of Watergate, Ford hinted that Republican congressmen, while supportive of the President, also favor release of the withheld tapes.

Ford has always been numbered among the most loyal congressmen to Mr. Nixon. When the existence of the tapes was disclosed, Ford said he found "nothing wrong with the practice" of making the tapes without informing the President's visitors that they were being recorded.

Republican senators, for the most part, have been more outspoken on the issue of releasing the tapes than their GOP counterparts in the House.

In an interview yesterday with Associated Press, Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, former Republican Party Chairman, expressed doubt that the majority of Americans would accept the President's arguments of executive privilege and separation of powers as a reason for withholding the tapes.

"I would guess, with the exception of a very few, Republicans in the Senate and Republicans in the House feel the tapes should be released," Dole said.

The longer uncertainty continues, Dole added, "the more difficult it is for the President and for the people who are running next year."

Republican congressmen, however, have been reluctant to make this case to the President.

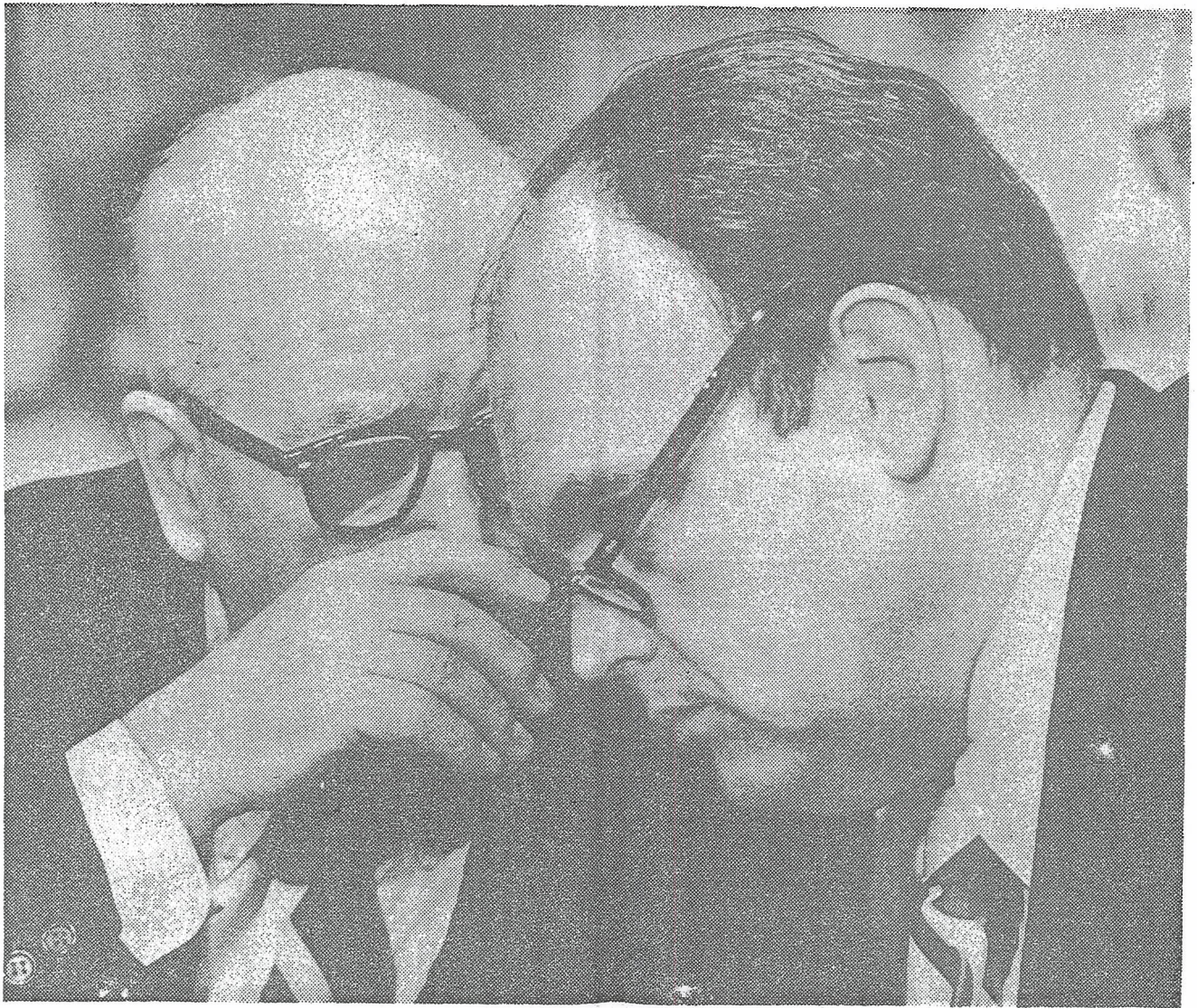
When a group of GOP congressmen went to the White House to discuss legislative matters with the President on Wednesday, Mr. Nixon did not raise the Watergate issue. The congressmen adhered to an unwritten rule of those meetings and did not bring up the issue themselves.

Meanwhile, Clark MacGregor, the former chairman of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, said he repeated inaccurate "hearsay information" fed to him by the White House on Watergate more than 100 times in the 18 weeks he was director of the campaign.

In a legal deposition filed in connection with Democratic lawsuits stemming from the break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972, MacGregor

said, "the truth would have been incredible to me had I been told it at that time."





By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

**John D. Ehrlichman, right, confers with his attorney, John Wilson, on a question posed at Watergate Hearing.**