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**Nixon Warned the Justice Department
Against Inquiry on His Watergate Role**

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WASHINGTON, May 1—President Nixon warned the Justice Department last April that any inquiry into his personal involvement in the Watergate cover-up would be "dangerous to the Presidency," the edited White House transcripts show.

The transcripts disclose that by late April Mr. Nixon was meeting regularly with Henry E. Petersen, an Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Watergate case, and won from Mr. Petersen a pledge that "we have no mandate to investigate the President."

By that time John W. Dean 3d, then the White House counsel, had begun a series of meetings with the original Watergate prosecuting team. Those conversations eventually became the basis for the widespread inquiry into Mr. Nixon's activities.

On April 27, according to the transcript, President Nixon was

**He Convinced Petersen
Such Step Would Pose
Peril to Presidency**

extremely agitated by a report—apparently relayed from one of his staff aides—that The New York Times and The Washington Post had learned that Mr. Dean was implicating him in his discussions with the prosecutors, headed by Earl J. Silbert, an Assistant United States Attorney.

"We've got to head them off at the pass," Mr. Nixon told Mr. Peterson, "because it's so damned — so damn dangerous to the Presidency."

"If there's one thing you have got to do," the President added a moment later, "you have got to maintain the Presidency out of this. I have got things to do for this country and I'm not going to have — now this is personal. I sometimes feel like I'd like to resign. Let Agnew be

President for a while. He'd love it."

Mr. Petersen subsequently assured the President that he had told the prosecutors that "we have to draw the line. We have no mandate to investigate the President. We investigate Watergate."

The April 27 conversation, the last of 46 edited transcripts that were made available yesterday by the White House, culminated an intense relationship between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Petersen in which the Justice Department official repeatedly expressed his faith in the innocence of the President.

From mid-April on, the transcripts show Mr. Petersen was providing the President with regular and detailed reports on the progress of the Watergate grand jury as well as information about the unofficial inquiries by the Federal prosecu-

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tors.

During those weeks, according to the transcripts, the President was resisting intense pressure from Mr. Petersen and from some White House aides, among them Leonard Garment, either to dismiss or temporarily relieve his two key deputies, H. R. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, and John D. Ehrlichman, his domestic adviser.

Much of the President's time with Mr. Petersen was spent in going over the accumulated evidence against the two men, and urging that Mr. Dean not be given immunity by the prosecutor to testify against them.

On April 19, the President met for more than an hour with John J. Wilson and Frank Strickler, then the attorneys for Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman, to review the facts. During that session, the President warned, "You got to remember Dean, as I have said, is a loose cannon."

On April 27, however, the President's concern — as reflected in the edited transcripts — abruptly shifted from Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman to his own legal status.

'Nothing Was Approved

"If Dean is implicating the Presidency," he told Mr. Petersen, "we are going to damn well find out about it." The President, apparently concerned about the implications of his March 21 conversation with Mr. Dean in which huge money payments were discussed, told the Assistant Attorney General that "my purpose [in speaking to Dean] was to find out what the hell had been going on."

"And believe me," he said,

"nothing was approved. I mean as far as I'm concerned — 'as far as I'm concerned turned it off totally.'"

"You've got to believe me," the President said a moment later. "I am after the truth, even if it hurts me."

"But believe me," he repeated, "it won't."

At the President's request, Mr. Petersen walked into the Cabinet room for a few moments late in the afternoon on April 27, and telephoned the United States Attorneys who were prosecuting the case. He subsequently reported that Charles Shaffer, one of Mr. Dean's attorneys, had visited the prosecutors and threatened to bring the President in—"not in this case but in other things."

But Mr. Petersen was able to assure the President that Mr. Dean was not implicating him directly — as the reporters for The New York Times and The Washington Post were alleging. "I know you can't believe these reporters all the time," Mr. Petersen said.

"I'm glad we have that then," the President responded with obvious relief. "When I heard that, I thought that Dean must be out of his damned mind or something."

Mr. Nixon then summoned Ronald L. Ziegler, his press secretary, and briskly told him, "Well, kill it. Kill it, hard."

"Take a hard line," he added, in reference to The Washington Post. "Anything on that [Dean's alleged implication of the President] and they better watch their damned cotton picking faces."

"Because boy," the President went on, "if there's one thing in this case as Henry will tell

you, since March 21st when I had that conversation with Dean, I have broken my ass to get the facts of this case."

Justice Department officials said today that Mr. Petersen's role in relaying grand jury and other information to President Nixon had been perfectly proper and in keeping with his official responsibilities.

During a conversation in April, according to the edited transcripts, Mr. Petersen told the President that he did not believe the Justice Department had constitutional jurisdiction over any criminal Presidential involvement.

"If it came to that I would have to come to you and say, 'We can't do that,'" he told Mr. Nixon. "The only people who have jurisdiction to do that is the House of Representatives, as far as I'm concerned."

Earlier, Mr. Petersen had told the President that "if I thought you were trying to protect somebody, I would have walked out."

Yet the transcripts also show that Mr. Nixon on occasion urged Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman to make use of confidential information relayed by Mr. Petersen. On April 14, for instance, he urged Mr. Haldeman that Mr. Ehrlichman "prepare" Goddon C. Strachan, a White House aide, before going into the grand jury by briefing him in advance about the allegations made by others.

"You ought to tell Strachan," Mr. Nixon said, "but not in a way that Strachan indicates [to the Federal prosecutors] that he knows what the other fellow did."

In a later telephone conversation that day with Mr. Ehrlichman, the President suggest-



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SUPPORT: President Nixon holding a scroll given to him by Mrs. Francis Finnen of Malibu, Calif. Pasted on the scroll are advertisements supporting Mr. Nixon.

ed that Charles W. Colson, another former White House aide, told in advance of incriminating testimony against him, "I do think we owe it to Chuck to at least—so that he doesn't, I mean, go in there and well, frankly, on a perjury rap . . . or do you think that is too dangerous?" he asked. Mr. Ehrlichman agreed to "give him a cautionary note anyway." The edited transcripts, as made available by the White House, give no indication whether any advance warnings were given, nor do the transcripts explain on what basis Mr. Nixon made his decision—announced on April 30—to accept the resignations of Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman.