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NIXON'S KEY DEFENSES are shattered by release of the tape transcripts.

The challenge to Dean's credibility becomes almost meaningless in light of the new disclosures. The defensive White House summary of the material is quickly overtaken by wide publicity given the actual text. The "executive-privilege" claim grows hard to uphold; Nixon faces pressure to disclose more. Congressional scrutiny of the transcripts raises suspicion of deletions.

Nixon's lofty, above-politics pose is refuted by evidence of attempts to use people and institutions to contain the scandal. Even hard-core Nixon backers may be repelled. The whole portrait of a cool, calm, decisive President in full charge of national affairs crumbles; the disclosures show he often couldn't make up his mind, yielded to aides, couldn't remember his prior decisions.

Nixon's main hopes now: using Ford to try to keep congressional Republicans in line; dragging out his fight, perhaps in lengthy court battles.

WATERGATE DISCLOSURES threaten to hurt Nixonites in September trials.

Knowledgeable lawyers eyeing the transcripts of White House conversations see serious damage for Mitchell, Ehrlichman, Haldeman. They figure that the credibility of any witness tied to the White House may be tattered beyond repair. Unfavorable publicity affecting the court cases threatens to persist longer than expected. "Those transcripts fed the press enough to last for months," one attorney says.

Defense lawyers fail so far to decide on any new strategy. They could seek delay of the trials beyond September, hoping that "prejudicial publicity" would gradually abate. Or they could try getting the trials moved to some remote place. But, one lawyer says, "I don't think there's a place in the country where the locals won't be drenched in this stuff."

The new blow so soon after the Mitchell-Stans acquittal disheartens the defense: "They didn't even let Mitchell have a week to feel good."

NIXONITES' SLURS on public figures make still more enemies.

Transcripts show that the President and his aides talked freely of "using" Sens. Baker, Gurney, Goldwater to help them in Watergate troubles. They saw Kleindienst as a man who could keep the inquiry from getting too close to the top. Nixon men pictured Assistant Attorney General Petersen as useful in a cover-up. Petersen retorted yesterday, "I'm no whore." The White House insiders talked of Rogers as a possible message carrier.

The White House inner circle depicted Ervin as a front man for Kennedy in the Watergate investigation; they ridiculed his reputation as a constitutional expert. The top men mocked their own associates. Colson was charged with the "fatal flaw" of talking too much. Nixon wrote off Gray as "a little bit stupid" when his nomination for

FBI chief ran into trouble.

But Chief Justice Burger is depicted as a helpful figure by Kleindienst. Burger advised the Attorney General on candidates for the special prosecutor's job.

CONNALLY HIRES the prestigious Edward Bennett Williams law firm to represent him in Prosecutor Jaworski's probe of milk politics. The former Treasury chief apparently fears indictment. Besides the price-support increase, the investigators focus on phone calls Connally allegedly made to Mitchell about an antitrust suit against a big dairy co-op.

IRONIES ABOUND in the Watergate transcript. Nixon assures Dean not to worry about his Ervin committee testimony. "You are going to make a hell of a good witness." Later, Nixon ponders the problem of selective disclosure: "What the hell does one disclose that isn't going to blow something?"

NIXON'S TEAMMATES fail to rally round him strongly. Only Ford and Commerce Secretary Dent loudly assert his innocence of wrongdoing. Agriculture Chief Butz shows growing caution about rebutting Watergate charges. Labor Secretary Brennan, usually a staunch Nixon backer, falls silent. HEW chief Weinberger shuns public defense of Nixon.

STRANGE LANGUAGE peppers White House transcripts. Planning to withhold information, Nixonites said they would "hard-line it" or "stonewall." Those taking strong positions were "playing hard ball." Nixon remarked that only "the softheads" are interested in Watergate.

UNIQUE CLOSE-UPS of the Nixon personality emerge from the tape transcripts.

The President, in private, showed frustration and despair over failure of cover-up plans. He told Assistant Attorney General Petersen: "I sometimes feel like I'd like to resign. Let Agnew be President for a while. He'd love it." Nixon often took a cold view of the outside world, telling Dean, "We have no friends." But he found it hard to let trusted aides go.

Nixon, in trying to contain the Watergate inquiry, misled some lieutenants. He knew the cover-up situation at least by March 21, 1973, when he met with Dean and Halde- man. Three weeks later, Kleindienst told the President that the Watergate prosecutors had cracked most of the case. Nixon acted "dumbfounded" and "very upset," Klein- dienst told the Senate Watergate committee.

The transcript of the later talk shows Nixon keenly interested in how the prosecutors found out, who was doing the talking.

MINOR MEMOS: A new bumper sticker appears in Washington—"Impeach the (Expletive deleted)." . . . Watergate conspirator Howard Hunt was a bit nonplussed when House Judiciary Committee staff members opened an interview with him by asking him to autograph three of his books. . . . A neighbor of John Dean in Alexandria, Va., is so upset by the throngs of curious tourists driving past that he's planning to seek a cut in his property taxes. . . . One wag suggests a title for a book by a former White House political operator Colson: "I was an (Expletive Deleted) for the Nixon administration."