

Excerpts of 2

Nixon Dialogues

Washington

Excerpts of the text of the White House edited transcript of a meeting between President Nixon and John Ehrlichman in the Oval Office, April 15, 1973, from 10:35 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

(Phone ring)

P. Who all have you seen this morning?

E. Well, I have Strachan up there right now.

P. Yeah. I had a call from Kleindienst.

E. Yeah. I heard you did and I thought you ought to take it. He...

P. Oh, sure, sure, I did. I didn't refuse. He said "I should see you, and I'd like to see you alone this afternoon. Today." I said fine. He's coming to the church service.

E. Yeah.

B. I'm going to see him in the EOB. He said he had been up most of the night with Titus. Who is Titus?

E. U.S. attorney in the District.

P. And what's the other fellow's name?

E. Silbert.

P. With regard to (unintelligible) this special prosecutor thing, what line do you want to take?

E. Well — let's think about it. He wants a special prosecutor so that he...

P. He can stay on as attorney general.

E. He can stay on and so that he doesn't have any — so that he personally doesn't taint the process by reason of his closeness to Mitchell. And that makes sense. Sneed does not have that problem, and Sneed is controllable within limits, and I think he is credible. I may be wrong about his credibility.

P. I agree with this, I think he's credible. The reason I think he's credible is something else — is that the grand jury I assume (unintelligible) comes through with some indictments. I mean, suppose they just indict Magruder and Mitchell (unintelligible).

P. The big fish.

E. Will second-guess Silbert. I assume you feel that his mandate is to...

P. Tear hell out of the place?

E. That's right.

E. And — that's just an additional risk which you wouldn't have with the Dean who's been a part of the process. I just — I don't think.

P. You didn't get Colson yet?

E. Not yet. No. He's at church apparently. Ziegler will be here at church. He's coming over. So I'll see him while you're seeing Kleindienst.

P. I suppose Colson is (unintelligible) Hunt, and Bittman which, of course, could tie Colson in, right?

E. Yeah.

P. Up to his navel. There's not a damn thing you can do about that is there, John?

E. No, really not, not at this point. You have to depend on Hunt's natural secrecy and secretiveness.

P. John, there is nothing in it for Hunt. Let me ask this, (unintelligible) go back over everything he's done prior to that time.

E. Well...

P. There might be something?

E. Well, he's up on, apparently, he has perjured himself a second time. Gee, he perjured himself at the trial, then he was granted immunity, came back into the grand jury, and perjured himself again. The U.S. attorney is looking down his throat and could say to him look, I can forget some of these counts if you're a good boy now.

P. Yeah, but the point that I make is this — is really, of course, you know, it's the limits of his testimony.

E. Mmhuh-mmhuh.

P. If he testified just on Watergate that's fine. He isn't going to get a damn thing more than anybody else.

E. I don't see any incentive for him to go broader, and I haven't heard a whiff of that.

P. That's going to be hard. This fellow's lied twice to (unintelligible)?

E. That's right. That's true.

P. The people you've got with obstruction are Hunt and Goldblatt and Bittman, right?

E. Oh, Rothblatt the lawyer.

P. Rothblatt?

E. Yeah, right. Well, I don't think Bittman is going to testify. I would be very surprised if he did.

P. Why?

E. Well.

P. Get him involved in obstruction of justice?

E. Well I just don't think — I think, I'm just guessing here, my guess is that he's worked himself out a haven in all of this.

P. Wouldn't serve his interests to get involved in the obstruction of justice. He's basically almost a bag man, not a bag man, but a message carrier, isn't he?

E. No. No. — Was an instigator — he was concerned about his fee. And a...

P. Oh, really, John?

E. Well, you had defendants who were concerned about their families. That's understandable. You had lawyers who were concerned about their families. That's less understandable.

E. They had the same people who had that legitimate motive had an illegitimate motive because they were involved in protecting their own culpability and here we're talking about LaRue, Magruder, Mitchell, possibly.

P. And you just thought that they (unintelligible).

E. Well, you know, the thing that ran through my mind . . .

P. Yeah.

E. Howard Hunt has written 40 books, and . . .

P. Yeah.

E. Howard Hunt was worried about the support of his family. And I could see Howard Hunt writing an inside expose of how he broke into the Democratic National Headquarters at the request of the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

P. Yeah.

E. Now, if I had a choice between getting contributions for the support of Howard Hunt's family.

P. Yeah. And that's . . .

E. And that was pretty easy.

P. And I suppose they would say though that . . .

E. Oh, didn't care what Howard Hunt said to the prosecutor. He can say anything he wanted to the prosecutor in a secret — in a secret session. That didn't hurt us.

P. It was all secret then.

E. I can say in truth and candor that Dean never explained to me that there was any kind of a deal to get these guys to lie or to change their stories or to refuse to testify to the trial of the action or anything of that kind. That was just never discussed. So I don't feel too uncomfortable with this.

P. Another (unintelligible) if Kleindienst resigns.

E. If Kleindienst resigns, that says there is something wrong with the Justice Department.

P. So you would keep him?

E. At this point.

P. Even if he disqualifies himself?

E. That's right — which wouldn't be anything too new.

P. Sure.

E. Now he may have some . . .

P. Other information?

E. Yeah, or technical reason or something of that kind.

P. (unintelligible) may have some information aside from the grand jury that I don't know if (unintelligible).

P. All you were ever asked was the general question, what's going on.

E. Yeah. He — well, this is kind of interesting. I may have told you about this, but the U.S. attorney now feels that Dean overreached them by providing information out of the grand jury to the Committee for the Re-Election. I think that may be legitimate criticism if he in fact did that. On the other hand, for him to provide us with information inside, for the orderly operation of the government, is another mat-

ter. That's two quite different things. If you peddle information from a grand jury to the outside, or if you peddle it inside to people who are responsible.

P. (Unintelligible)

E. Oh that was, let me think.

P. Particularly in the office of attorney general. Magruder says he approved the million dollars — that's about right.

E. And that Mitchell was the one who disapproved it.

P. Well, this would (unintelligible) Magruder - Dean (unintelligible).

E. 'Cause Dean shows up very prominently in the whole Magruder thing.

P. And Dean was in Florida you said on some occasion? Remember the Florida trip you told me about?

E. No. No. The three people there — Mitchell was already down there — Magruder and LaRue went down.

P. For what purpose?

E. Brought him the final Liddy proposal.

P. The two fifty?

E. With the Watergate and the Fontainebleau and the McGovern headquarters spelled out.

P. I see. Magruder talks pretty much, doesn't he?

E. Mmhuh.

P. (Unintelligible)

E. Yeah. And in a lot of these things, of course, he had a lot of different versions of everything, but I think it's reasonable to assume that he passed that along to Dean.

P. Sure.

E. Mitchell phoned me this morning to say that Daniel Schorr had been on the shuttle when he rode back to New York.

P. CBS caught him?

E. Yeah, and, well no, they saw him here.

B. Yeah.

E. And then they sent somebody out to the airport.

P. (Unintelligible)

E. And so, he said to Schorr he didn't know anything about the Watergate,

and he didn't think anybody cared about the Watergate and he had just been down to the White House and he hadn't seen the President, That was all that he said. He is looking forward to testifying before the Ervin committee, and so forth. So he called me this morning just to say that.

P. (Unintelligible)

E. He wanted us to know what he had actually said in case there was any press report to the contrary.

P. Well, Ziegler should simply say, yes, he was here to see you (unintelligible) it's true (unintelligible).

P. Ziegler (unintelligible)

E. I'm glad you complimented him last night. That's

E. (unintelligible)

P. He is a good man. They know it. They know it. You've got to give them their stories. They respect him for it.

E. I thought you were going to go with the Biblical conclusion that the guy who serves two masters, but a

P. Yeah.

E. He will hate the one and love the other, but a — (laughter).

P. Yelling. Watergate. Watergate. Tell us about Watergate. Seriously, it's a hell of a Washington story.

E. And Haynes Johnson, of course, is notorious for finding what he's looking for.

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Later that same day the President had a telephone conversation with then-Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, in which they discussed the meetings where the Liddy intelligence plans were brought up.

P. Dean was in the meetings. Dean claims that he said no. And Mitchell does, too. And that's what you've got to live with.

K. But then they feel the serious aspect of the conduct thereafter came in the, according to this testimony,

that, with respect to obstruction of justice.

P. Right.

K. — And that is the admission that LaRue, Mardian, Dean say that he was rehearsed and rehearsed and coached and coached by LaRue, Mardian, Mitchell, Dean, all for his initial testimony before the Grand Jury. Well, Magruder could testify that he believed that — there's two things — the obstruction of justice and suborning a witness of perjury.

P. That could get them all on that.

K. And if LaRue, Mardian, Dean, Mitchell said, "No, we didn't do that but we were told what the story was — we did nothing. Not testify about anything." If that's

P. And then you give 'em money?

K. Yes.

P. That's — I agree.

K. Yes — obstruction of justice.

P. Yeah. If the purpose of it is to get them not to talk. In other words, not to carry out what the judge said. I can see that. Sure.

P. Oh, hell — don't they know about it?

K. Tomorrow morning it's likely to be all over town. Tuesday noon.

P. Involving Haldeman and Ehrlichman, too?

K. Yeah — just generally. This Sirica, Judge Sirica, is not enforcing the strict requirements of law with respect to secrecy in Grand Jury proceedings.

P. Certainly the one with regard to Mitchell — do they, let me ask you this — do they tell you flatly Mitchell will be indicted?

K. Yes. They do — so will Dean.

P. Will be indicted?

K. Yeah.

P. Even without his testimony — they're talking about it?

K. Magruder's testimony will be enough to indict him.

P. Strachan — will he be indicted?

K. They don't know yet. Incidentally, Dwight Chapin testified with respect to the so-called Segretti affair.

P. Yeah.

K. And said that Haldeman knew about it.

P. That's true. But that's not something they're in — because of Segretti — even though Segretti pleaded the Fifth. It's just bull — the Segretti thing — it's not this — it's just . . .

K. That has nowhere near the potential of this situation. They only think it does with respect to Bob, it casts a little bit of a taint.

P. I know.

K. That reflects upon the rest of it.

P. Now what is your, what is your recommendation, then?

K. Well, first I have this situation. It seems to me that so long as I do anything at the Department of Justice I cannot hereafter be with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Larue. They won't believe that we didn't talk about the Watergate case.

P. Oh. Your point is that it'll break — that their names have been mentioned?

K. You know — it'll come out in trial and testimony.

P. What's your recommendation on it?

K. Well . . .

P. Let me tell you what concerns me, if I may. I want to talk to the special prosecution a little bit. You know, it's embarrassing and all the rest, but it'll pass. We've got to — we've got to just ride it through, Dick.

K. Yes.

P. Do the best we can. Right?

K. Yes, sir.

P. We don't run to the hills on this and so forth. The main thing is to handle it right.

K. Those are my inclinations, Mr. President.

P. Well, you know — we've got to handle it right.

K. And also I think — well, everybody was just scared to death. They didn't know where the damn thing was going to end.