

... 'Get That Done'

On March 21, 1973, John W. Dean 3d informed President Nixon that one of the original Watergate defendants, E. Howard Hunt, was blackmailing the White House. With numerous diversions, the President's response threaded consistently through their subsequent 103-minute conversation.

Mr. Dean: I would say these people are going to cost a million over the next two years.

Mr. Nixon: We could get that. On the money, if you need the money you could get that. You could get a million dollars. You could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten. . . . Just looking at the immediate problem, don't you think you have to handle Hunt's financial situation damn soon? . . . It seems to me we have to keep the cap on the bottle that much, or we don't have any options. . . . Let us suppose that you get the million bucks, and you get the proper way to handle it. . . . It would seem to me that would be worthwhile. . . .

Mr. Dean: I am not sure that you will ever be able to deliver on the clemency. It may be just too hot.

Mr. Nixon: You can't do it politically until after the '74 elections, that's for sure. Your point is that even then you couldn't do it.

Mr. Dean: That's right. It may further involve you in a way you should not be involved in this.

Mr. Nixon: No—it is wrong, that's for sure. . . . But at the moment don't you agree it is better to get the Hunt thing that's where that—

Mr. Dean: That is worth buying time on.

Mr. Nixon: That is buying time, I agree. . . . (Haldeman enters) Hunt, because he is most vulnerable in my opinion, might blow the whistle and his price is pretty high, but at least we can buy the time on that as I pointed out to John . . . Your feeling is that we just can't continue to pay the blackmail of these guys?

Mr. Dean: I think that is our great jeopardy.

Mr. Nixon: Now let me tell you. We could get the money. There is no problem in that. We can't provide the clemency. Money could be provided. Mitchell could provide the way to deliver it. That could be done. . . . That's why for your immediate things you have no choice but to come up with the \$120,000, or whatever it is. Right?

Mr. Dean: That's right.

Mr. Nixon: Would you agree that that's the prime thing that you damn well better get that done?

Mr. Dean: Obviously he ought to be given some signal anyway.

Mr. Nixon: (Expletive deleted), get it.

Four weeks later, on April 17, Mr. Nixon and Mr. Haldeman were recalling this conversation.

Mr. Haldeman: What you should have said is that blackmail is wrong, not that it's too costly. . . .

Mr. Nixon: Well, (inaudible), I suppose then we should have cut—shut it off, 'cause later on you met in your office and Mitchell said, 'That was taken care of.'

Mr. Haldeman: The next day.