

More Transcript Doubts

Washington

Two seemingly casual comments by President Nixon and H.R. Haldeman on the time of day raise the possibility that part of one of the subpoenaed presidential conversations has been unaccountably excised from the transcript of the session made public by the White House.

Early on the morning of Saturday, April 14, 1973, the President, Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman gathered in Mr. Nixon's hideaway office next door to the

White House to discuss ways of encouraging former Attorney General John N. Mitchell to tell the Watergate Prosecutors what he knew about the unraveling coverup of the bugging case.

At one point, according to the transcript, the President interrupted the discussion and apparently picked up the telephone to speak with Steve Bull, his appointments secretary, about an incoming engagement.

"Put that thing with Haig," Mr. Nixon told Bull. "What time you got now? Quarter after? I'll be there . . ."

Mr. Nixon did not mention the hour, but eight pages farther into the transcript Haldeman, then his chief of staff, announced that "it is 11 o'clock."

Although 45 minutes appear to have elapsed between the two remarks, it requires less than ten minutes to read the eight pages of intervening dialogue aloud in a conversational manner, with ample time for reflective pauses.

Asked about this apparent discrepancy and about the transcript of an earlier conversation on March 22, 1973, that seems to end before the recorded time of the meeting's conclusion, a White House spokesman replied that "substantial deletions are always noted in the transcripts."

Asked whether there were lesser deletions that were not noted, the spokesman said, "I honestly don't know."

There are also indications elsewhere in the massive volume of transcriptions submitted by Mr. Nixon to the House Judiciary Committee, which is considering his impeachment, that the conversational styles of the President and his aides do not square with the time allotted to this particular portion.

A second meeting between Mr. Nixon and Haldeman the same day, for example, also requires eight pages of transcript to recount. According to the White House volume, however, it lasted 18 minutes.

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