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Transcripts 'Dismay,' 'Shock' Hill Members

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House members who have been reading President Nixon's edited transcripts of his Watergate conversations reacted yesterday with "shock," "dismay" and "alarm" at the level of conversation in the Oval Office of the White House.

Interviews with nearly a score of members produced a strong and unanimous negative reaction to the 1,200 pages of recorded talks, and an oft-expressed opinion that Mr. Nixon's participation in the conversations and release of the transcripts has demeaned the office of the presidency.

But they also generally expressed the view that the transcripts have not proved that he should be impeached. They said hard evidence of criminal or seriously improper conduct by the President is required for impeachment.

"I can't condone the statements in the Oval Office," said Rep. Marvin Esch (R-Mich.). "I don't run my office that way. But you can't impeach for appalling style. There must be hard facts."

House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill (D-Mass.) said he had looked only briefly at the transcripts and would not express an opinion, but stated that, "from what members are saying there is no question that it has hurt him."

Rep. John Ashbrook (R-Ohio), a leading conservative who has faulted Mr. Nixon as being too liberal on some issues, said the transcripts don't square with the President's assurances that they would show him innocent of any involvement in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in.

"I listened to him on television last Monday night and for the first time in a year I believed him," said Ashbrook. "Then I read the

March 21st transcript and it was incredible, unbelievable." It was during this conversation nearly 14 months ago that Mr. Nixon said he first learned of hush money being paid to the Watergate burglars.

House Speaker Carl Albert said he had only looked over the volume of transcripts, but observed that "I can't make much sense out of most of it. . . . There are so many deletions." The President deleted "expletives" and matter he considered irrelevant to the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry.

Rep. Otis Pike (D-N.Y.), who said he has read the entire volume and is starting through a second time, said:

"The tone is appalling. When you realize any editing that was done was obviously not done to make it sound worse, you just wonder what on earth the unedited things could possibly say that would be worse than what you've got. The image of a bunch of people in the Oval Office sitting around discussing various ways they could appear to be forthcoming. . . . at the same time doing everything they could not to be forthcoming. . . ."

Pike added that "when you compare the President's public statements at any given date with private conversations immediately prior, you know the public statements didn't mean what they said."

Rep. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.), third-ranking House Republican leader but not close to the White House, said he was "dismayed and disheartened" by the transcripts.

"When you think that for three weeks or so (in March and April, 1973) the strategy was not to get the truth out but to minimize the political fallout . . . war-gaming . . . how to protect the White

House staff . . . I think it has hurt the President's case. Why those people do what they do, I'm not sure I will ever be able to understand."

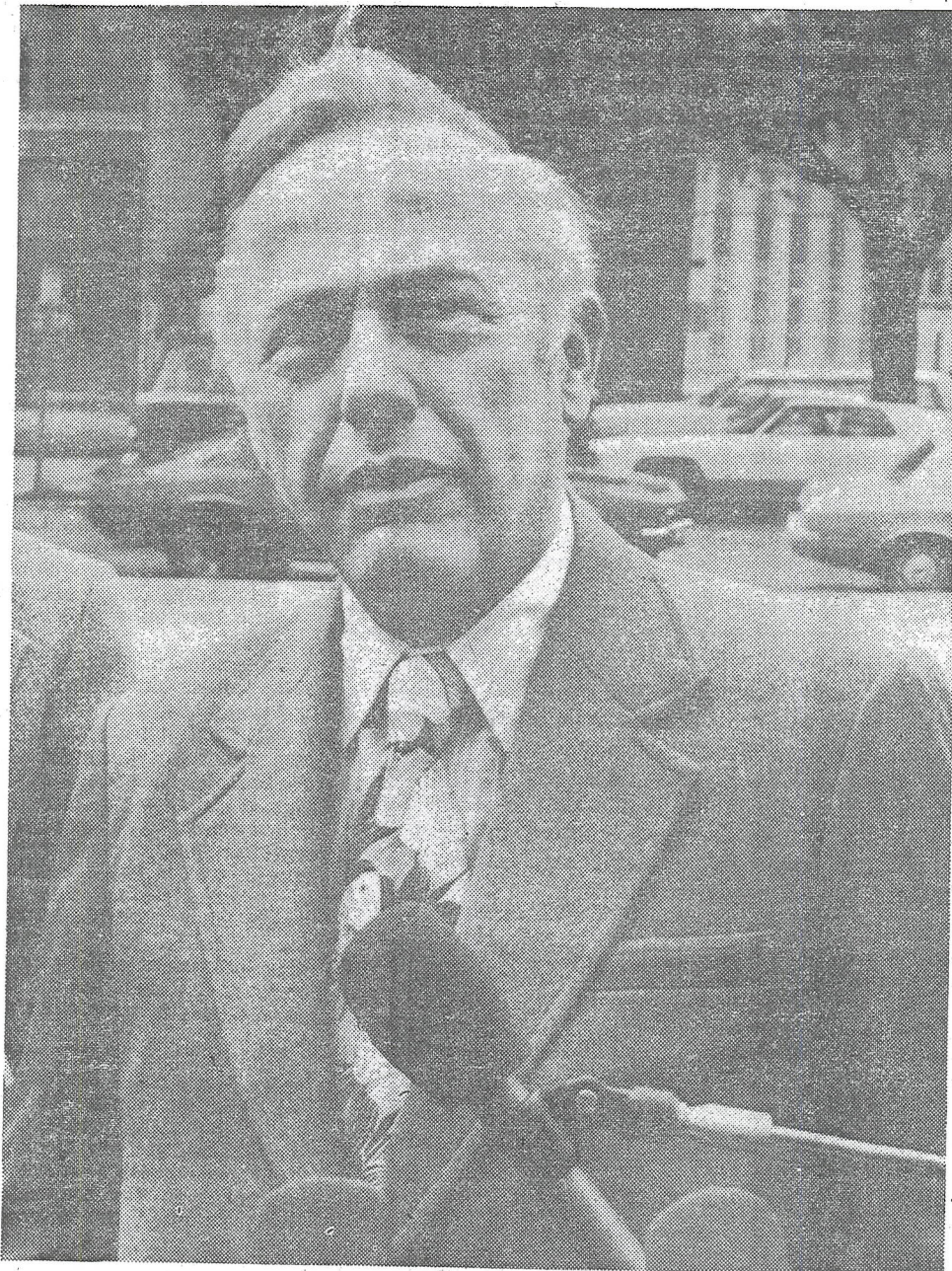
Rep. William Steiger (R-Wis.) said his "biggest disappointment is that there is no explicit statement by the President or his staff that any of the activities were morally or governmentally wrong. I don't think the transcripts conclusively establish either guilt or innocence."

Rep. Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) said: "They offend me. They make me question whether the man has any understanding of or commitment to the democratic process. I don't consider that the normal kind of conversation I expect a President to be involved in."

Rep. Dave Martin (R-Neb.), among the most conservative of Republicans and part of the party leadership as ranking Republican on the House Rules Committee, said: "I think the general impression is this has hurt the President. I think the American people will be disillusioned. It should knock out the myth of King Richard."

Rep. Edward Boland (D-Mass.) found the conversations "demeaning, alarming and shocking, particularly with respect to the office of the presidency itself. He helped himself with his speech on television last Monday, but the more people read, the more alarmed they will be. Still, it doesn't prove guilt or innocence."

"It gives you another impression of this guy," said Rep. Silvio Conte (R-Mass.). "Everyone holds the office of President in high esteem, but the language, the poor level of conversation. I have a better quality of conversation with my staff than they have. It really erodes the office of the presidency. I



Associated Press

James D. St. Clair tells newsmen of delay won on subpoena for 64 Watergate tapes.

have a hard time reading them. I can't stand it."

Rep. Robert McClory (R-Ill.), second-ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, called the "level of conversation . . . injurious to the President and to the office of the presidency."

Rep. George Danielson (D-Calif.), also a member of the committee that will recommend to the House whether Mr. Nixon should or should

not be impeached, said he found the March 21 transcript on the Watergate cover-up "very damaging" to the President. He said it "clearly implies that as early as March 21, and I infer from his comments earlier," the President knew that payments were being made to the Watergate burglars for their silence on who else knew of the opera-

tion. Unless nullified by other evidence, Danielson said he believed the conversation "comes very close" to showing obstruction of justice by the President.

Rep. Tom Railsback (R-Ill.), another senior committee member, said he had read about 350 pages. "The President said it was going to reveal some things embarrassing to him. I sure agree."