

Mixup Found in Nixon Transcript

Washington *WRP*

Apparently as a result of an accident, the edited White House transcripts of presidential tape recordings contain two different versions of a portion of the same conversation.

Substantial differences in key words and phrases in the two versions ("president" in one; "press" in the other, for example), underscore the technical difficulties faced by the White House in transcribing the tapes and insuring the accuracy of the transcripts.

Late yesterday, in answer to inquiries by the Washington Post, the White House acknowledged that three pages of the transcripts contain two separate versions of the same conversation between President Nixon and Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen on April 16, 1973.

In addition to the confusion over the words "president" and "press," the two versions include these other substantial differences: "Gray" (former acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray) in one and "they" in the other; "you" in one and "we" in the other; "stick" and "still," "bah" in one and "act" in the other. The first

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version of the segment in question contains 21 "inaudible" references while the second has 12.

The contrast between the two versions demonstrates the problem in making an accurate transcript.

The House Judiciary Committee and the office of the Special Watergate prosecutor have insisted that only the original tapes — and not edited transcripts — constitute acceptable evidence.

"We did the best we could," said Deputy White House press secretary Gerald Warren, who confirmed the two segments contain literally dozens of differences.

If the Judiciary Commit-

tee is not satisfied with the transcripts, Warren suggested, it could exercise President Nixon's offer to allow the committee's chairman and ranking minority member to listen to the original tapes.

Both the Judiciary Committee and the office of special Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski have subpoenaed White House tape recordings and have been told by the President that the edited transcripts — of fewer conversations than those sought — will have to suffice.

The tape of the April 16 meeting between Mr. Nixon and Petersen was one of those sought by subpoena of both the House and Jaworski, but was not turned over.

The existence of the two versions of the April 16 conversations caught two White House officials by surprise. "It kind of undercuts the argument that the transcripts will do the job, doesn't it?" observed one source.

In an introduction to the edited transcripts, President Nixon said that "the attached transcripts represent the best efforts accurately to transcribe the material on the recorded tapes."

Last week, however, the Washington Post quoted a

White House source as saying that the transcribing of the tapes "had to be a sloppy job. . . . Just his imple typing mistakes could change meanings."

A source familiar with the transcribing operation speculated yesterday that the discrepancy in the April 16 transcript was the result of at least a portion of the two-hour meeting being transcribed by two different typists.

Apparently both typists inadvertently went over at least some part of the same material, the source suggested, and came up with versions so dissimilar that they appeared to be different interchanges.

Then, the source added, the two versions were proba-

bly mistakenly tacked onto one another by someone assembling the full, edited transcript from sections compiled by different typists.

The portion of the April 16 conversation that is duplicated involves a discussion between the President and Assistant Attorney General Petersen about what public response Mr. Nixon should make to the developing Watergate scandal.

The first version begins on

page 857 of the edited transcripts published by the Government Printing Office. The second immediately follows at the bottom of page 858. Both occupy slightly more than one full page of typescript.

Each version begins with slightly differing language in a garbled paragraph spoken by Petersen. The conversation would appear to involve suggestions that U.S. Attorney Harold Titus talk to U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica about aspects of the Watergate case.

In the first version, the President replies as follows: "I don't think (inaudible) that's (inaudible)."

In the second version, the President's reply is transcribed as being totally inaudible.

Later in the first version, Petersen responds to one of the President's statements by saying, "no — no. Well."

In the second version, however, the quotation from Petersen is non-existent and the conversation merely moves from one statement by the president to another by Mr. Nixon.

The two versions suggest that the typists and editors of the transcripts did not al-

ways get the exact language of the participants and sometimes tried instead to get only the sense of the conversation.

For example, in the first version, Petersen at one point says: "I think it is." In the second, he says, "I understand it is." Though both "think" and "understand" have similar meanings, they do not sound alike, even on a garbled or difficult-to-understand tape.

The existence of the two versions of the Nixon-Petersen interchange was brought to the attention of the Washington Post by John B. Northrup of Huntington, N.Y. Northrup wrote a letter about the matter on Saturday, after reading the transcripts in the New York Times.

Staff members of the House Judiciary Committee have already stated that the White House transcripts are less complete than transcripts the committee itself has prepared. In those instances, Judiciary already possesses actual tape recordings surrendered by the White House to the special prosecutor's office — which in turn forwarded them to the House impeachment inquiry.