

2 Versions of Tapes Differ

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The transcript of the Sept. 15, 1972 White House conversation being used by the House Judiciary Committee in its impeachment proceedings contains dozens of differences from the edited version of the same conversation released by the White House on April 30.

In addition to words, phrases, sentences and—in some instances—whole passages left out of the White House version of the same conversation, the House committee transcripts show differences in words used and even the persons speaking.

In general, the House committee version transcribed using sophisticated electronic equipment, is easier to follow in comprehending the topics being discussed by President Nixon, White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and White House counsel John W. Dean III.

The two transcripts demonstrate that persons using different equipment to listen to the same tape could achieve different results in transcribing. The House committee obtained a tape of the Sept. 15 meeting from the special Watergate prosecutor. Both the House committee and the special Watergate prosecutor have demanded that President Nixon turn over tapes of subpoenaed conversations rather than transcripts.

At one point in the conversation, Dean assesses the situation for President Nixon. In the House version, Dean says:

"Three months ago I would have had trouble predicting where we'd be today. I think that I can say that 54 days from now that, uh, not a thing will come crashing down to our, our surprise."

In the edited White House version, Dean says:

"Three months ago I would have had trouble predicting there would be a day when this would be forgotten, but I think I can say that 54 days from now nothing is going to come crashing down to our surprise."

At another point in the conversation, Dean briefs President Nixon on developments in a civil suit brought by the Democratic Party against President Nixon's re-election committee. In the House committee version, the conversation appears as follows:

Dean: Well, now, that's good and bad. Uh, Judge Richey is not known to be one of the intellects on the bench. That's conceded by many that he is uh, uh—

President: (Unintelligible) in his own stupid way he's sort of, uh—

Dean: Well, he's been thoroughly candid in his dealing with people about the case. He's made several entrees, uh, off the bench, to, to, uh, one, to Kleindienst, two, to, uh his old friend Roemer McPhee to keep Roemer abreast of what his thinking

is. He told Roemer he thought that Maury ought to file a libel action.

President: Did he?

Haldeman: (Laughter)

President: Good.

In the White House version, the same passage appears as follows:

Dean: Well now that is good and bad. Judge Richey is not known to be one of the (inaudible) on the bench, that is considered by me. He is fairly candid in dealing with people about the question. He has made several entrees off the bench—one to Kleindienst and one to Roemer McPhee to keep Roemer abreast of what his thinking is. He told Roemer he thought Maury ought to file a libel action.

President: Did he?

Haldeman: Can he deal with this concurrently with the court case?

In the White House version, the transcript does not reflect President Nixon saying, "Good," when he learns that Richey had suggested that Nixon campaign finance director Maurice H. Stans file a libel suit against Democratic officials. (Richey has denied the charge.)

The difference is significant since the White House, in an analysis of Dean's testimony before the Senate Select Watergate committee last summer, disputed Dean's version of the Sept. 15 conversation. Dean had testified that when President Nixon learned that Nixon re-election committee lawyers were having private contacts with Judge Richey, Mr. Nixon said, "well, that's helpful."

"Mr. Dean's suggestion," the White House analysis asserted, "that the President greeted with pleasure a statement that improper contacts were being made with a federal judge turns out, on inspection of the tapes, to be false." The House committee version suggests that Dean's testimony on this point might have been correct after all.

At another point in the transcripts, the House committee and the White House differ as to who is speaking. In the House committee version, this exchange occurs:

Haldeman: He may be getting \$900,000 from somebody.

President: From two or three. He may have some big angels. I don't think he is getting a hell of a lot of small money.

In the White House version, the exchange occurs as follows:

Haldeman: He may be getting \$900,000 from somebody. He may have two or three angels.

President: I don't think he is getting a hell of a lot of small money.

The White House version also appears at times to obscure what is being said by placing the wrong word in a sentence. In the House committee version, Dean is quoted as saying:

Uh, as, as this case has been all along, you spin out horribles that, uh, you, you can conceive of of, and so

we just don't do that. I stopped doing that about, uh, two months ago.

In the White House version, the word "horribles" appears as "oracles":

"As these committees spin out oracles we used to get busy on each one. I stopped doing that about two months ago.

The White House acknowledged on Monday that, as the result of an apparent accident, a transcript of an April 16, 1973, conversation between President Nixon and Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen contained two different versions of the same conversation.

In addition to differences between what is on the two

tapes, the House committee transcript contains passages that the White House transcript has deleted without any indication that material has been left out.

In the House committee version, the first three pages show a conversation between Haldeman and Mr. Nixon—with Dean out of the room—about Dean's handling of White House matters. In the White House version, the transcript begins as Dean enters the room.

The White House transcript also deletes without noting it, a discussion among the three men concerning steps to be taken against radio and television stations owned by The Washington Post Co.