

Statements by Nixon About Watergate

Following are excerpts from statements by President Nixon, made on May 22, 1973, and April 29, 1974, regarding what he said was his knowledge of the Watergate break-in and the subsequent cover-up:

May 22, 1973

The burglary and bugging of the Democratic National Committee headquarters came as a complete surprise to me. I had no inkling that any such illegal activities had been planned by persons associated with my campaign; if I had known I would not have permitted it. My immediate reaction was that those guilty should be brought to justice and, with the five burglars themselves in custody, I assumed that they would be."

Within a few days, however, I was advised that there was a possibility of C.I.A. involvement in some way.

It did seem to me possible that, because of the involvement of former C.I.A. personnel, and because of some of their apparent associations, the investigation could lead to the uncovering of covert C.I.A. operations totally unrelated to the Watergate break-in.

In addition, by this time, the name of Mr. Hunt had surfaced in connection with Watergate, and I was alerted to the fact that he had previously been a member of the special investigations unit in the White House. Therefore, I was also concerned that the

Watergate investigation might well lead to an inquiry into the activities of the special investigations unit itself.

In this area, I felt it was important to avoid disclosure of the details of the national security matters with which the group was concerned. I knew that once the existence of the groups became known, it would lead inexorably to a discussion of these matters, some of which remain, even today, highly sensitive.

I wanted justice done with regard to Watergate; but in the scale of national priorities with which I had to deal—and not at that time having an yidea of the extent of political abuse which Watergate reflected—I also had to be deeply concerned with insuring that neither the covert operations of the C.I.A. or the activities of the White House investigations units—and to see that this was personally coordinated between General Walters, the deputy director of the C.I.A., and Mr. Gray of the F.B.I. It was certainly not my intent, nor my wish, that the investigation of the Watergate break-in or of related acts be impeded in any way.

April 29, 1974

As far as what the President personally knew and did with regard to Watergate and the cover-up is concerned, these materials [the transcripts of White House conversations between Sept. 15, 1972 and April 27, 1973], together with those already

made available, will tell it all.

Despite the confusions and contradictions, what does come through clearly is this:

John Dean charged in sworn Senate testimony that I was fully aware of the cover-up at the time of our first meeting on Sept. 15, 1972. These transcripts show clearly that I first learned of it when Mr. Dean himself told me about it in this office on March 21, some six months later.

Incidentally, these transcripts, covering hours upon hours of conversation, should place in somewhat better perspective the controversy over the 18½-minute gap in the tapce of a conversation I had with Mr. Haldeman back in June of 1972.

Now how it was caused is still a mystery to me, and I think to many of the experts as well. But I am absolutely certain, however, of one thing—that it was not caused intentionally by my secretary, Rose Mary Woods, or any of my White House assistants.

And certainly if the theory were true that during those 18½ minutes Mr. Haldeman and I cooked up some sort of a Watergate cover-up scheme that so many have been quick to surmise, it hardly seems likely that in all of our subsequent conversations—many of them are here, which neither of us expected would see the light of day—there is nothing remotely indicating such a scheme, indeed quite the contrary.