



Errors in Court

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THE Justice Department used recklessly inaccurate transcripts of secret tapes to help convict Oklahoma's former Governor David Hall in a nationally publicized bribery trial.

The official transcripts are loaded with serious mistakes. For example, the word "most" is transcribed as "less," and "disobeying" comes out as "just being." Throughout the transcripts, innocent words appear incriminating and vice versa, and one person's statements are put in the mouth of another.

Hall's own conversations, recorded without his knowledge while he was still in office, were used to help convict him. Yet part of a key conversation, which tended to exonerate him, strangely was omitted from the transcripts that were used at the trial.

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THE ENORMITY of the errors and omissions in the Hall transcripts — combined with similar mistakes we discovered in an unrelated Washington criminal case — casts doubt on the convictions of hundreds of suspects around the country.

For it has been common practice to tap telephones, bug rooms and rig informers with body recorders to gather evidence. The transcripts of these tapes have been used in countless proceedings, ranging from narcotics trials to Richard Nixon's impeachment hearings.

Wherever such transcripts have been used, the danger exists that the suspects have been improperly jailed

unless their lawyers took the unusual pains of going over the government's transcripts word for word and comparing them with the original tapes, as we have done.

A veteran Justice Department lawyer, whose job would be jeopardized if we identified him, has confirmed that the "typical, normal transcription" is a "shoddy job." He considers it "horrendous" that suspects may go to prison on such fraudulent evidence. Yet the department has been satisfied to let its tainted convictions stand.

In the Oklahoma case, Hall was indicted shortly after he stepped down as governor last January. He and Dallas financier W.W. "Doc" Taylor were charged with attempted bribery and related felonies. Taylor allegedly offered \$50,000 for Hall's help in securing a contract.

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HALL AND TAYLOR were prosecuted by U.S. Attorney William Burkett, a Nixon appointee and political opponent of Hall. At the trial, the tapes were a sensation.

Federal Judge Fred Daughtery allowed the error-riddled transcripts to be used at the trial, and both defendants were convicted. Hall was sentenced to three years, Taylor to 18 months. The case is now headed for the appeals courts.

We have listened carefully to the tapes and have compared them to the transcripts. We found error after error, as many as 100 per page.