

Tape Saving Was Advised By Haldeman

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By Lawrence Meyer
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Former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman said he gave President Nixon a "strong recommendation" against destroying the White House tape recordings when Nixon raised the matter as the Watergate cover-up was unfolding.

Now, Haldeman said, he feels the tapes should have been destroyed.

In a CBS-TV (WTOP) interview, he commented: "... I never—stupidly—didn't really think the thing through ... nor did I think through the enormous damage that would be done to me and to Richard Nixon and to all the other participants ..."

CBS reportedly paid Haldeman at least \$25,000 for interviews that are to be aired in two one-hour segments today and next Sunday.

The former White House aide, who is appealing his conviction for conspiracy, perjury and obstruction of justice after being sentenced to a minimum of 2½ years in prison, steadfastly maintained his innocence while admitting to a "woeful lack of perception as the (Watergate) case developed." He said he "totally failed to perceive Watergate as a matter of major potential danger or of major presidential concern."

Haldeman said that at one point, as the Watergate cover-up was unravelling, Nixon raised the question of whether the tapes should be destroyed.

"And my strong recommendation was that they should not be destroyed," Haldeman said. "Now this is before anybody knew that they existed, except the technicians and the President and me."

Haldeman, who said his position on destroying the tapes "was another one of my errors in judgment" in Watergate, said he reasoned at the time that the tapes "shouldn't be destroyed because they were enormously valuable — of historical value."

In addition, he said, "I thought they would be valuable to the President in knowing what had actually been said at various meetings in his office."

"Had I thought it through," Haldeman continued, "I would have realized that as a practical matter, that the release of the tapes was not good."

Regarding the taping from a moral point of view, Haldeman said, "I would say that given what we now know, and

what's happened, that it was a disastrous thing to have done. But what's happened is a total perversion of what was being done. What was being done was the production of the tape for the President's own use, for confidential use."

Haldeman said he was astonished to learn that the existence of the tapes—which played a key role in forcing Nixon's resignation and bringing about Haldeman's conviction—had been made public at the Senate Watergate committee hearings in July, 1973.

"I had never really thought that the existence of the tapes would be known," he said. "I mean that seems a little dense, I guess today. But I really hadn't. It just — that wasn't within the range of alternatives of what might happen in my mind."

Although Haldeman was widely regarded as being the man closest to Nixon, Haldeman said, in response to a question: "I did not love Richard Nixon. I do not love Richard Nixon. I have enormous respect for Richard Nixon."

Haldeman commented that Nixon is "weird in the sense of inexplicable, strange, hard to understand."

He said he talks "very occasionally" with Nixon and that they talk "some" about Watergate.

"He doesn't have much to say," Haldeman said of Nixon. "There isn't much for him and I—him and me—to say about Watergate. He knows what I know and I know what he knows. And there isn't ... there isn't much to add or subtract from that."