

KPPA: Pacifica reporters in Miami Beach neglected the release of the [Republican] platform today in favor of what promised to be an interesting press conference with Attorney General Richard Kleindienst. Mr. Kleindienst didn't show up, but that did not deter Paul Fisher from filing this story.

Fisher: Attorney General Richard Kleindienst scheduled a press conference this afternoon but when reporters showed up for it they found that a substitution had been made. The man on the podium was not Richard Kleindienst but Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Elliott Richardson. The HEW Secretary said Kleindienst had been called away at the last minute to an important meeting, which immediately led to questions as to whether the Attorney General's absence had anything to do with the so-called Watergate affair, the recent attempt to bug the Democratic party's headquarters.

One thing led to another and Richardson wound up by saying that he didn't think the Committee to Re-Elect the President was responsible for the bugging; because A) they wouldn't be dumb enough to plan it, and B) if they were dumb enough to plan it they wouldn't have been stupid enough to get caught. This in turn led reporters to ask why they wouldn't be stupid enough to get caught, in other words, were they so professional at it because they had planted other bugs without getting caught? There were several other questions along those lines, and at one point Richardson tried to blame the bugging of the Democrats on Cuba. When that didn't work out the HEW Secretary seemed to suggest that reporters move on to another topic. Here's the way it went.

Richardson [voice]: I can only say that having had some exposure to political organizations myself, and some knowledge of the Republican National Committee, I can hardly believe that if - which is a tremendous "if" because I don't think they would be that stupid - that if they undertook anything like this that it would be handled that ineptly.

Q [male voice]: Mr. Richardson, I'm kind of interested in your statement that you've had enough experience with political organizations - I take it, then, that you've known of decisions to bug and have watched bugging and have found it to be capable - or what is it that you were --

Richardson [interrupts]: No, I've been in on the kinds of discussions in which amateurs talk about spying on the opposition, and I've seen that kind of scheme overruled usually by - in fact I've never seen one actually carried out. Farthest I've ever seen on either side - it's happened on both sides - is the device of planting somebody as a volunteer in the headquarters to pick up what he can, that sort of thing does happen, but, you know, it's - any experienced politician is apt to recognize that you can get too smart for yourself.

Q [different male voice; sound quality poor at beginning of question, but it seems to be "May I ask your theory of what happened, or why they were there?"]

Richardson: No - I - I - I see references to Havana* and Cubans and people like this which - which seems to me to - to offer at least the possibility of an explanation.

Q [third male voice]: I don't follow you, I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary. You mean Castro's Cuba, the government of Cuba?

Richardson: Well, I - I'm - since I'm - since I'm reflecting only what I've - rumors that I've seen recorded in the press, it probably wouldn't serve any useful purpose for me to elaborate on my fragmentary understanding of what they're talking about.

Q [female voice]: Mr. Secretary, are you saying that all of the references and connections to the Committee to Re-Elect the President don't tell you that there was some connection between the Committee to Re-Elect the President and the bugging incident? I mean --

Richardson [interrupts]: There may have been people who had some connection with the Committee to Re-Elect and this activity, but that doesn't by itself establish any

more than that single fact. It certainly does not suggest that any responsible person in the Committee to Re-Elect procured this to be done, knew that it was going to be done, or approved it. And as I say it seems to me that the probabilities are all the other way.

I sort of expected that somebody might ask me about the veto of the HEW labor appropriation bill.

Fisher: HEW Secretary Elliott Richardson. And incidentally, nobody did ask him about that labor appropriations bill.

[End of item.]