

Mr. Nixon on Watergate:

An Issue That Won't Be Talked Away

"Some people, quite properly appalled at the abuses that occurred, will say that Watergate demonstrates the bankruptcy of the American political system. I believe precisely the opposite is true. Watergate represented a series of illegal acts and bad judgments by a number of individuals. It was the system that has brought the facts to light and that will bring those guilty to justice—a system that in this case has included a determined grand jury, honest prosecutors, a courageous judge, John Sirica, and vigorous free press.

"It is essential now that we place our faith in that system—and especially in the judicial system . . .

"It is also essential that we not be so distracted by events such as this that we neglect the vital work before us, before this nation, before America, at a time of critical importance to America and the world."—President Nixon in a television address, April 30, 1973.



[Two days later, at the Pentagon Papers trial in Los Angeles, Judge W. Matthew Byrne Jr. gave the defense an FBI summary of an interview with John D. Ehrlichman. It disclosed that Mr. Nixon had ordered an independent investigation of defendant Daniel Ellsberg which led to the burglary of his psychiatrist's office by a special White House unit called the "plumbers." Byrne also acknowledged two meetings with Ehrlichman (and a handshake with Mr. Nixon) early in April to discuss his possible interest in the job of FBI director.]

"Let me say, I didn't get where I am by ducking tough issues . . . I'm keenly aware of the fact that many Americans — everybody in this room, for example — are concerned about the developments that we've been reading about and hearing about in recent weeks and recent months . . . I will simply say to you tonight that this nation — Republicans, Democrats, Independents, all Americans — can have confidence in the fact that the Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, and special prosecutor that he will appoint in this case will have the total cooperation of the executive branch of this government . . .

"I also want to add a word with regard to what all this is going to mean to the next three-and-a-half and a bit more years that we have in office as a result of the election last November. I can assure that we will get to the bottom of this very deplorable incident . . . But the most important thing I want to say tonight is this: We are not going to allow this deplorable incident to deter us or deflect us from going forward toward achieving the great goals that an overwhelming majority of the American people elected us to achieve in November of 1972." — Speech to Republican dinner, Washington, May 9, 1973.

[The following day, a New York grand jury indicted former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans in connection with Robert Vesco's \$200,000 contribution to the Nixon reelection campaign. On May 17, the Senate Watergate Committee opened its hearings and John Dean alleged that Mr. Nixon had some knowledge of the coverup. The committee also heard of efforts to involve the CIA in the coverup, as well as the details of secret campaign funds and "dirty tricks," and of White House efforts to use the IRS against those on an administration "enemies list."]

"Considering the number of persons involved in this case whose testimony might be subject to a claim of executive privilege, I recognize that a clear definition of that claim has become central to the effort to arrive at the truth. Accordingly, executive privilege will not be invoked as to any testimony concerning possible criminal conduct or discussions of possible criminal conduct, in the matters presently under investigation, including the Watergate affair and the alleged coverup. I want to emphasize that this statement is

limited to my own recollections of what I said and did relating to security and to the Watergate. I have specifically avoided any attempt to explain what other parties may have said and done. My own information on those other matters is fragmentary, and to some extent contradictory. Additional information may be forthcoming of which I am unaware."—Statement, May 22, 1973.

[In that same May 22 speech, Mr. Nixon confirmed that he had approved a plan for domestic intelligence gathering—which included breaking and entering—during the spring of 1970. It was withdrawn when, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover objected. Mr. Nixon also discussed the creation of the "plumbers" unit and his fear that Watergate probes might unravel CIA operation. During June and July, the Watergate hearings continued. On July 16, former White House aide Alexander P. Butterfield revealed that Mr. Nixon had been secretly recording all conversations in his White House office since early 1971. When Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and the Watergate Committee both asked for some of the tapes, the White House refused, claiming, among other things, executive privilege.]

"There are these and other great issues that we were elected overwhelmingly to carry forward in November 1972. And what we were elected to do, we are going to do, and let others wallow in Watergate, we are going to do our job."—Speech to the White House staff, July 20, 1973.

[On Aug. 6, Vice President Agnew was reported under federal investigation on charges of bribery, extortion and tax fraud in connection with state building contracts in Maryland. The same day, the government reported spending \$4,000,000 for improvements, all in the name of "security," at Mr. Nixon's Florida and California homes.]

"The point that I make now is that we are proceeding as best we know how to get all those guilty brought to justice in Watergate. But now we must move on from Watergate to the business of the people, and the business of the people is in continuing with initiatives we began in the first administration."—Press conference, Aug. 22.

[A week later, Judge Sirica ordered Mr. Nixon to turn over to the court—for his private inspection—nine tape recordings of presidential conversations. The White House appealed and on Oct. 12, the Court of Appeals upheld Sirica's order. Meanwhile, on Sept. 5, Ehrlichman, Egil Krogh, David Young

and G. Gordon Liddy were reported indicted in California in the Ellsberg psychiatrist burglary. And on Oct. 10, Vice President Agnew resigned after pleading no contest to one count of income tax evasion.]

"... I have taken this step with the greatest reluctance, only to bring the issue of Watergate tapes to an end and to assure full attention to more pressing business affecting the very security of the nation."—Statement on Oct. 19.

[On Oct. 19, Mr. Nixon decided not to appeal the court decision ordering him to hand over tapes of presidential conversations. He offered Cox a "compromise" which Cox refused; whereupon he ordered first Attorney General Richardson and then Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus to fire Cox and both resigned in protest. As acting Attorney General, Solicitor General Robert Bork finally prevailed upon to fire Cox. Within a few days, 84 resolutions dealing with impeachment were introduced in the House. On Oct. 23, as the protest grew, Mr. Nixon reversed his position on executive privilege and agreed to comply in full with the court order to turn the nine tapes over to Sirica.]

[On Oct. 31, the White House informed the court that two of the nine recordings did not exist.]

"As a result of the deplorable Watergate matter, great numbers of Americans have had doubts raised as to the integrity of the President of the United States. I've even noted that some publications have called on me to resign the office of President of the United States. Tonight I would like to give my answer to those who have suggested that I resign. I have no intention whatever of walking away from the job I was elected to do."—Television speech, Nov. 7, 1973.

[On Nov. 21, the White House informed the court that yet another problem existed with the tapes—an 18½-minute segment of critical conversation between the President and H. R. Haldeman was blank. Presidential secretary Rose Mary Woods testified that she might have caused five minutes of the gap. A group of experts examined the tape and subsequently reported that the 18½-minute erasure could not have happened the way Miss Woods said it did. The FBI was called in to investigate and the matter was handed over to the grand jury. Meanwhile, in December, Mr. Nixon released his tax returns which showed that he paid minimal taxes in 1970 and 1971, that he took a \$576,000 deduction for the gift of his vice presidential papers, and that he paid no state tax. The House Judiciary Committee set April as a target for completion of its impeachment inquiry and on Jan. 24 Egil Krogh, leader of the "plumbers" was sentenced to six months in jail for the Ellsberg psychiatrist burglary.]

"I believe the time has come to bring that investigation and the other investigations on this matter to an end. One year of Watergate is enough. And the time has come... for all of us to join together in devoting our full energies to these great issues I have discussed tonight..."—State of the Union Message, Jan. 30, 1974.

Stephen S. Rosenfeld's column will appear on Sunday.