

Ehrlichman Denies Plea Bargaining

SEATTLE, April 17 (AP) — John D. Ehrlichman labelled as false today reports which said he believed President Nixon had lost effectiveness and that an 18-minute White House tape gap was intentional.

Ehrlichman also rejected reports quoting friends as saying he had engaged in plea-bargaining with Watergate prosecutors and that he carried a resentment against former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman.

In a prepared statement, Ehrlichman, the former chief domestic affairs adviser to Nixon, said a Los Angeles Times story quoting his friends was "false in tone and content."

The Times story published Wednesday, quoted unnamed friends as saying Ehrlichman had privately expressed disappointment with Nixon and that he thought Nixon's effectiveness had ended.

A friend of Ehrlichman's interviewed by The Associated Press Wednesday said Ehrlichman had discussed with prosecutors the terms under which he would plead guilty to a reduced Watergate-related charge, but that no agreement was reached.

The Times story quoted one close friend as stating emphatically that Ehrlichman would settle with Watergate prosecutors on a single reduced charge. And it quoted friends as saying he believed an 18-minute gap in a tape of a conversation between Nixon and Haldeman had been erased deliberately.

Ehrlichman said in his statement he would not allow any questions from newsmen "because I am under court order not to discuss the subject of current proceedings in any way."

The account of possible plea bargaining is false, he said, "because I am not guilty of any of the charges leveled against me and I intend to prove my innocence."

He said he thought Nixon's "domestic record has been as excellent as in foreign affairs. What he can accomplish in the future will depend on how he weathers the current attacks.

"I remain optimistic that he will come out of all of this with a regained effectiveness."

"Concerning the tapes, I have no way of knowing what caused any gaps," he said in the statement. "At no time have I entertained the belief that someone intentionally altered the tapes."

Ehrlichman said his resignation one year ago as the Watergate scandal broke open did not involve "any imposition of conditions on the President. At no time did I request or did he agree to make disclosures. By the time I left I felt that he had, in fact, made a full disclosure of what he knew about Watergate."

The Times' story said Ehrlichman thought he had an understanding with the President that Nixon would make a complete statement on Watergate, and quoted his friends as saying he was extremely disappointed that Nixon had not done so.

Ehrlichman said his expressed criticism of "some of the tactical responses by the White House to press stories, etc., in the past year were nothing more than a citizen engaging in the great national pastime of kicking the White House staff."

Ehrlichman, who has been indicted by two of the grand juries investigating aspects of Watergate, said his financial affairs had never been discussed with friends and never would be.

He said his law practice and current business in Seattle provide "sufficient income to live within our means."

A land-use institute set up here recently by Ehrlichman and some associates was "worth while for the many who attended and we more than made our expenses," he said.

Ehrlichman said in his statement he had been named as a defendant in 14 civil suits in the past year, and so far "six of these cases have been dismissed." He said: "All of these cases were occasions for headline stories in the Eastern press when the suits were filed."