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NYTimes Transcript of Frost's Television Interview

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WASHINGTON, May 4—The following is a transcript prepared by David Frost of the televised portions of his interview of former President Richard M. Nixon about the Watergate scandal, with some of Mr. Frost's introductory remarks excised:

THURSDAY, MAY 5, 1977

With Nixon About

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Watergate Scandal

FROST: Mr. President, to try and review your account of Watergate in one program is a daunting task, but we'll press first of all through the sort of factual record and the sequence of events as concisely as we can, to begin with. But just one brief, preliminary question. Reviewing now, your conduct over the whole of the Watergate period, with the additional perspective now of three years out of office and so on, do you feel that you ever obstructed justice, or were part of a conspiracy to obstruct justice?

NIXON: Well, in answer to that question, I think that the best procedure would be for us to do exactly what you're going to do on this program; to go through the whole record in which I will say what I did; what my motives were; and then I will give you my evaluation as to whether those actions or anything I said, for that matter, amounted to what you have called an "obstruction of justice." I will express an opinion on it, but I think what we should do is to go over it—the whole matter—so that our viewers will have an opportunity to know what we are talking about. So that, in effect, they, as they listen, will be able to hear the facts, make up their own minds. I'll express my own opinion. They may have a different opinion. You may have a different opinion, but that is really the best way to do it, rather than to preclude it in advance and maybe prejudice their viewpoint.

Q. I'm very happy to do that, because I think the only way really to examine all of these events is on a blow-by-blow account of what occurred. So, beginning with June 20th, then, what did [H. R.] Haldeman [former White House chief of staff] tell you during the 18 1-2-minute gap?

A. Haldeman's notes are the only recollection I have of what he told me. Haldeman was a, a very good note-taker, because, of course, we've had other opportunities to look at his notes and he was very . . . He was making the notes for my Presidential files. The notes indicated—Q. P.R. offensive and . . . A. That's right.

Concerned About Bugging

Q. . . . All of that. A. Well, of course. Ah, they . . . The notes were—Q. Diversion. A. Well, you've asked me what it was. My recollection was that the notes showed . . . "Check the EOB [Executive Office Building] to see whether or not it's bugged." Obviously, I was concerned about whether or not the other side was bugging us. I went to say, "Let's get a public relations offensive on what the other side is doing in this area and so forth" and in effect, "don't allow the Democratic opposition . . . build this up into basically . . . blow it up into a big political issue." Those were the concerns expressed. And I have no recollection of the conversation except that.

Q. But, as far as your general state of knowledge that evening, when you were talking with Chuck Colson [former special counsel to the President] on the evening of June the 20th, it suggests what from somewhere your knowledge has gone much further. You say, "If we didn't know better, we'd have thought the whole thing had been deliberately botched." Colson tells you, "Bob is pulling it all together. Thus far, I think we've done the right things to date." And you say, "Ba . . . ah, basic . . ." He says, "Basically, they're

all pretty hard-line guys." Ah, and you say, "You mean, Hunt?" [E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former White House consultant] and, he says . . . and you say, "Of course, we're just gonna leave this where it is with the Cubans . . . at times, I just stonewall it." And, you also say, "We gotta have lawyers smart enough to have our people delay." Now, somewhere you were pretty well informed by that conversation on June 20th.

A. As far as my information on June 20th is concerned, I had been informed by . . . with regard to the possibility of Hunt's involvement, whether I knew on the 20th or the 21st or 22d, I knew something . . . I learned in that period about the possibility of [G. Gordon] Liddy's involvement. [Liddy was a staff member of the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President]. Of course, I knew about the Cubans and [James W.] McCord [a security adviser for the committee], who were all picked up at the scene of the crime. Now, ah, you have read here, excerpts out of a conversation with Colson. And, let me say as far as my motive was concerned, and that's the important thing. My motive was, in everything I was saying, or certainly thinking at the time, was but, to be sure that as far as any slip-not to try to cover up a criminal action. Over, or should I say, "slop-over," I think, would be a better word. Any slop-over in a way that would damage innocent people, or blow it into political proportions . . . it was that that I certainly wanted to avoid.

Q. So, you invented the C.I.A. thing on the 23d, as a cover?

A. No. Now, let's, let's use the word "cover-up" though in the sense that it had—should be used and should not be used. If a cover-up is for the purpose of covering up criminal activities, it is illegal. If, however, a cover-up as you have called it, is for a motive that is not criminal, that is something else again. And my motive was not criminal. I didn't believe that we were covering any criminal activities.

I didn't believe that [Attorney General] John Mitchell was involved. I didn't believe that, for that matter, anybody else was. I was trying to contain it politically. And that's a very different motive from the motive of attempting to cover up criminal activities of an individual.

'You Knew About Them'

And so, there was no cover-up of any criminal activities; that was not my motive.

Q. But surely, in all you've said, you have proved exactly that that was the case; that there was a cover-up of criminal activity because you've already said, and the record shows, that you knew that Hunt and Liddy were involved; you'd been told that Hunt and Liddy were involved.

At the moment when you told the

C.I.A. to tell the F.B.I. to "stop period," as you put it, at that point, only five people had been arrested.

Liddy was not even under suspicion. And so you knew, in terms of intent and you knew in terms of foreseeable consequence that the result would be that, in fact, criminals would be protected. Hunt and Liddy, who were criminally liable, would be protected. You knew about them.

The whole statement says that "we, we're gonna . . ." Haldeman says, "We don't want you to go any further on it. Get them to stop. They don't need to pursue it; they've already got their case." Walters [Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of the C.I.A.] notes that he said, "Five suspects had been arrested, this should be sufficient." You said, "Tell them, don't go any further into this case period."

By definition, by what you've said and by what the record shows, that, per se, was a conspiracy to obstruct justice, because you were limiting it to five people, when, even if we grant the point that you weren't sure about Mitchell, you already knew about Hunt and Liddy and had talked about both, so that is obstruction of justice—

A. Now just a moment—

Q.—period.

A. Ah, that's your conclusion.

Q. It is.

A. But now let's look at the facts. The fact is, that as far as Liddy was concerned, what I knew was, was only the fact that, ah, he was the man on the committee who was in charge of intelligence operations.

As far as Hunt is, was, concerned, and if you read that tape you will find

'I was trying to contain it politically. And that's a very different motive from the motive of attempting to cover up criminal activities of an individual.'

I told them to tell the F.B.I. they didn't know, apparently, and the C.I.A. that Hunt was involved.

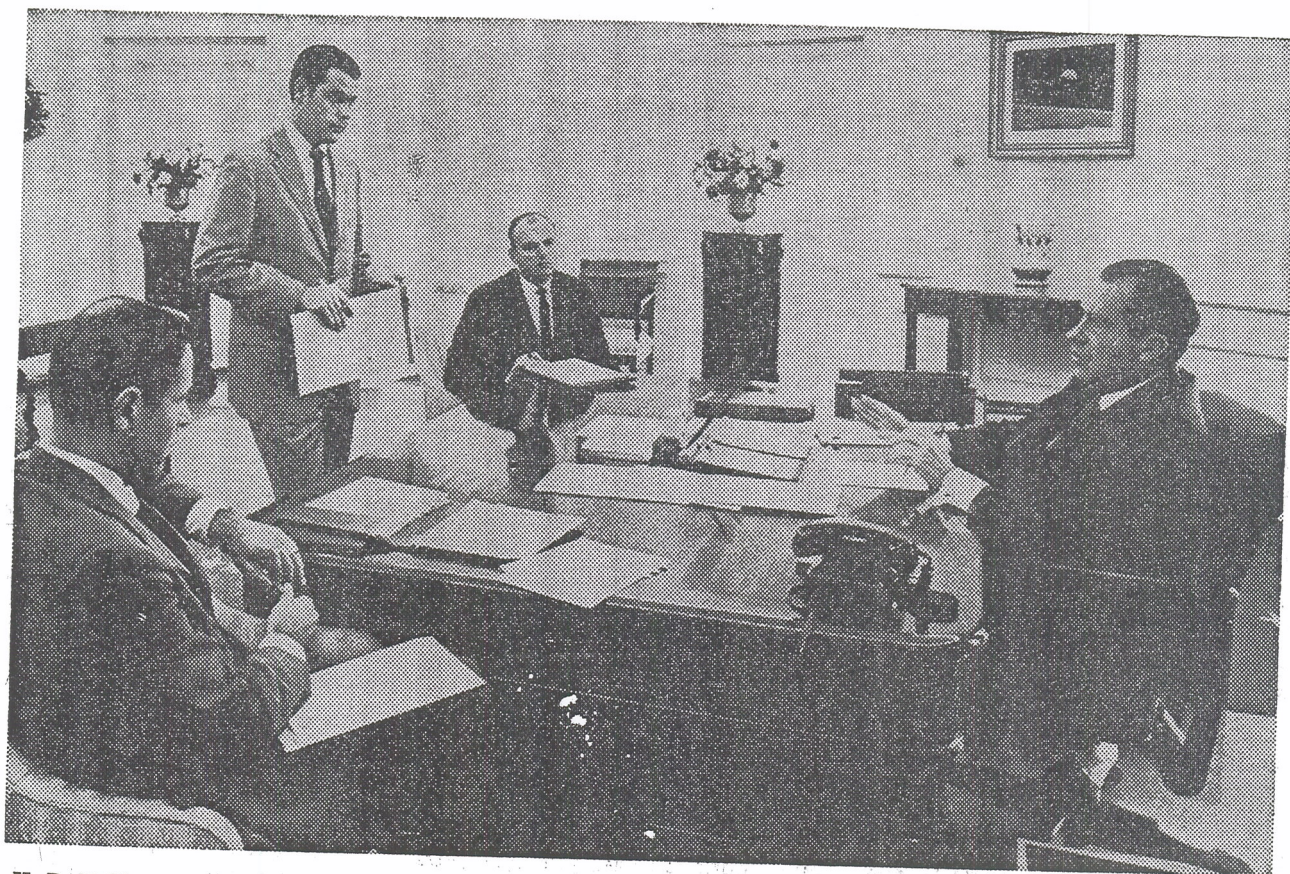
And so, there wasn't any, any attempt to keep them from knowing that Hunt was involved. The other important point to bear in mind when you ask "What happened?" and so forth, is that what happened two weeks later.

Congratulated Gray

Two weeks, later when I was here in San Clemente, I called Pat Gray, the then-F.B.I. Director, on the phone to congratulate the F.B.I. on a very successful operation they had in apprehending some hijackers in San Francisco, or some place abroad.

He then brought up the subject of the Watergate investigation. He said that there are some people around you who are mortally wounding you, or would, might, mortally wound you, because they're trying to restrict this investigation.

And, I said, "Well, have you talked to Walters about this matter?" And he



White House Photograph

H. R. Haldeman, left; Dwight L. Chapin, standing; John D. Ehrlichman and President Nixon in the Oval Office of the White House in 1970. Mr. Chapin served almost eight

months in prison for perjury before the Watergate grand jury. Mr. Ehrlichman is now serving a prison term and Mr. Haldeman is free on bail pending appeal.

said, "Yes." I said, "Does he agree?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, Pat, I know him," had known him very well, of course, over the years—I did call him by his first name. I said, "Pat, you go right ahead with your investigation." He has so testified, and he did go ahead with the investigation.

Q. Yes, but the point is that obstruction of justice is obstruction of justice, if it's for a minute, or five minutes, much less for the period June 23d to July the 5th, when I think it was when he talked to Walters and decided to go ahead. The day before he spoke to you on July the 6th. It's obstruction of justice how, for however long a period, isn't it?

A. And, also, it's no defense to say that the plan failed, that the C.I.A. didn't go along with it, refused to go along with it, that it was transparent.

I mean, if I try and rob a bank and fail, that's no defense. I still tried to rob a bank. I would say, you still tried to obstruct justice, and succeeded for that period. He's testified they didn't interview [Manuel] Ogarrio [a Mexican lawyer], they didn't do all of this. And so, I would have said it was a successful attempt to obstruct justice for that brief period.

A. Now just a moment. You're again making the case, which of course is your responsibility, as the attorney for the prosecution.

Let me make the case as it should be made, even if I were not the one who was involved for the defense.

'Case for the Defense'

The case for the defense here is this: You use the term "obstruction of justice." You perhaps have not read the statute with regard to, respect—ah, obstruction of justice.

Q. Well, I have.

A. Obstruction . . . well, oh, I'm sorry, of course, you probably have read it. But possibly you might have missed it, because when I read it many years ago in, perhaps when I was studying law, although the statute didn't even exist then, because it's a relatively new statute, as you know.

But in any event, when I read it even in recent times, I was not familiar with all of the implications of it. The statute doesn't require just an act. The statute has the specific provision one must corruptly impede a judicial—

Q. Well, you, a corrupt—

A.—matter.

Q. Endeavor is enough.

A. A con—all right, we'll—a conduct

—endeavor—corrupt intent. But it must be corrupt, and that gets to the point of motive. One must have a corrupt motive. Now, I did not have a corrupt motive.

Q. You, you were—

A. My motive was pure political content a corrupt motive. If so, for example, we—President Truman would have tainment. And political containment is been impeached.

Q. But the point is that, the point is that your cling. Motive can be helpful when intent is not clear. Your intent is absolutely clear. It's stated, again: "Stop this investigation here, period."

The foreseeable, inevitable consequence, if you'd been successful, would have been that Hunt and Liddy would not have been brought to justice. How can that not be a conspiracy to obstruct justice?

A. No. Wait a minute. "Stop the investigation." You still have to get back to the point that I have made previously, that, when I, that my concern there, which was conveyed to them, and the decision then was in their hands, my concern was having the investigation spread further than it needed to.

Involvement of Liddy

And, as far as that was concerned, I don't believe, as I said, we turned over the fact that we knew that Hunt was involved; that a possibility that Liddy was involved; ah, but under the circumstances—

Q. You didn't turn that over though did you?

A. What?

Q. You didn't turn that over.

A. No, no, no, no, no. We turned over the fact that Hunt, that, that Hunt was, was involved.

Q. You never told anyone about Liddy though.

A. No, not at that point.

Q. Now after the Gray conversation, the cover-up went on. You would say, I think, that you were not aware of it. I, I think, was arguing that you were a part of it as a result of the June the 23d conversations. But you say that you were—

A.—Are you sure I was a part of it, as a result of the June 23d conversations?

Q. Yes.

A. After July 6th, when I talked to Gray?

Q. I would have said that you joined the conspiracy, which you therefore never left.

A. Yes. No. Well, then we totally

disagree on that.

Q. But, I mean, that, that's, those are the two positions.

A. That's right.

Q. Now, you, in fact, however, would say that you first learned of the cover-up on March the 21st. Is that right?

A. On March 21st—was the date when I was first informed of the fact. The important fact, to me, in that conversation, was of the blackmail threat that was being made by Howard Hunt, who was one of the Watergate, ah, ah, participants, but not about Watergate.

Q.—So, during the period between those two dates, between the end of June, beginning of July, and March the 21st, while lots of elements of the cover-up as we now know were continuing, were you ever made aware of any of them?

A. No, I, I don't know what you're referring to.

'Raising of Hush-Money'

Q. Well, for instance, the, your personal lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach, coming to Washington to start the raising of \$219,000 of hush-money, approved by Haldeman and Ehrlichman. They went ahead but without—without clearing it with you?

A. That was one of the statements that I've made, which, after all of the checking we can possibly do . . . we checked with Haldeman, we checked with Ehrlichman.

I wondered, for example, if I had been informed, if I had been informed that money was being raised for humanitarian purposes, to help these people with their defense, I would certainly have approved it.

If I had been told that the purpose of the money was to raise it for the purpose of keeping them quiet, I would have been—disapproved it. But the

truth of the matter is that I was not told. I did not learn of it until the March period.

Q. But in that case, if that was the first occasion, why did you say, in, ah, such strong terms to Colson, on February the 14th, which is more than a month before, you said to him: "The cover-up is the main ingredient; that's where we gotta cut our losses; my losses are to be cut; the President's loss has gotta be cut on the cover-up deal."

A. Why did I say that? Well, because I read the American papers. And, in

January, the stories that came out, they're not, not just from The Washington Post, the famous series by some unnamed correspondents, who have written a best-selling book since then, but The New York Times, the networks and so forth.

We're talking about "hush-money." They were talking about clemency pay, ah, ah, for cover-up, and all the rest. It was that that I was referring to at that point. I was referring to the fact that there was a lot of talk about cover-up, and that this must be avoided at all cost.

'One Very Clear Quote'

Q. But, there's one very clear, self-contained quote, and I read the whole of this conversation of February the 13th, which I don't think's ever been published, but, and there was one very clear quote in it that I thought was—

A. It hasn't been published, you say?

Q. No, I think it's, it's available to anybody who consults the records, but, ah—

A. Oh, yes.

Q. But people don't consult all the records.

A. Just wondered if we'd seen it.

Q. Well, I'm, I'm sure you have, yes, but,—where the President says this, on February the 13th:

"When I'm speaking about Wa—" This is to Colson: "When I'm speaking about Watergate, though, that's the whole point of, of the election. This tremendous investigation rests unless one of the seven begins to talk. That's the problem."

Now, in that remark, it seems to me that someone running the cover-up couldn't have expressed it more clearly than that, could they?

A. What do we mean by "one of the seven beginning to talk?"

I've—how many times do I have to tell you that as far as these seven were concerned, the concern that we had, certainly that I had, was that men who worked in this kind of a covert activity, men who, of course, realize it's dangerous activity to work in, particularly since it involves illegal entry, that once they're apprehended, they are likely to say anything.

And the question was, I didn't know of anybody at that point—nobody on the White House staff, not John Mitchell, anybody else, that I believed was involved, ah, criminally.

But on the other hand, I certainly could believe that a man like Howard Hunt, who was a prolific bookwriter, or anyone of the others under the pressures of the moment, could have started blowing, and putting out all sorts of stories to embarrass the Administration, and as it later turned out, in Hunt's case, to blackmail the President to provide clemency, or to provide money, or both.

Q. I still just think, though, that one has to go contrary to the, ah, normal usage of language of almost 10,000 gangster movies to interpret "this tremendous investigation rests, unless one of the seven begins to talk; that's the problem," as anything other than some sort of conspiracy to stop him talking about something damaging—

A. Well, you can, you can state—

Q.—to the press, and making the speech—

A. You can state your conclusion, and I've stated my views.

Q. That's fair.

A. So now we go on with the rest of it.

Testimony of John Dean

Q. That President Nixon knew of the cover-up before March the 21st is disputed, but there is no dispute that on March the 21st, John Dean [counsel to the President] did lay out many of the key elements of the cover-up for the President.

Dean recited the history of the break in and listed the criminal liability of top Presidential aides, like Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Dean himself, for actions which followed the burglary.

Dean told the President that hundreds of thousands of dollars had been paid to keep the Watergate burglars silent through their January trial. He said,

further, there was sentencing only two days away; Howard Hunt was now demanding a payment of \$120,000 for continued silence. And, Dean suggested that the price tag for blackmail could total one million dollars.

The period following the meeting on March the 21st, up to April the 30th,

when Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned, is crucial. The President would later claim that he worked to get the truth out during this period. His critics would claim that he continued to cover it up.

Looking back on the record now, of that [March 21, 1973 conversation with John W. Dean 3d], as I'm sure you've done, in addition to the overall details, which we'll come to in a minute. Bearing in mind that a payment probably was set in motion prior to the meeting and was certainly not completed until late the evening of the meeting, wouldn't you say that the record of the meeting does show that you endorsed, or ratified, what was going on with regard to payment to Hunt?

A. No, the record doesn't show that at all. In fact, the record actually is ambiguous until you get to the end, and then it's quite clear. And, what I said later in the day, and what I said the following day, shows the facts really are, and completely contradicts the fact, the point, that has been made.

Criticizes Jaworski

And again, here's a case where Mr. Jaworski [Leon Jaworski, the Watergate special prosecutor], in his book, conveniently overlooks what actually was done and what I did say the following day, as well as other aspects of it.

Let me say, I did consider the payment of \$120,000 to Hunt's lawyer and to Hunt for his attorney's fees and for support. I considered it not because Hunt was "gonna blow," using our gangster language here, on Watergate, because as the record clearly shows, Dean says, "It isn't about Watergate, but it's going to talk about some of the things he's done for Ehrlichman."

As far as the payment of the money was concerned, when the total record is read, you will find that it seems to end on a basis which is indecisive. But I clearly remember, and you undoubtedly have it in your notes there, my saying that the White House "can't do it." I think, for my, was my last words.

Because I had gone through the whole scenario with Dean, and I laid it out. I said, "Look, what would it be—I mean, when you're talking about all of these people, what would it cost to take care of them for—and we talked about a million dollars.

And, I said, "Well, you could raise the money, but doesn't it finally get down to a question of clemency?" And, he said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, you can't provide clemency and that would be wrong for sure." Now, if clemency's the bottom line, then providing money isn't going to make any sense.

Q. But, when you, we talk about the money, the \$120,000 demand that, in fact, he got \$75,000 on that evening. Bearing in mind what you were saying earlier about reading the overall context of the conversation, is there any doubt, when one reads, reading the whole conversation:

One. "You could get a million dollars and you could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten."

Two. "Your major guy to keep under control is Hunt?"

Three. "Don't you have to handle Hunt's financial situation?"

Four. "Let me put it frankly: I won-

'Let me say, I did consider the payment of \$120,000 to Hunt's lawyer and to Hunt for his attorney's fee and for support.

der if that doesn't have to be continued?"

Five. "Get the million bucks, it would seem to me that would be worth while."

(6) "Don't you agree that you'd better get the Hunt thing?"

(7) "That's worth it, and that's buying time."

(8) "We should buy the time on that, as I pointed out to John."

(9) "Hunt has at least got to know this before he's sentenced."

(10) "First, you've got the Hunt problem, that ought to be handled."

(11) "The money can be provided. Mitchell could provide the way to deliver it. That could be done. See what I mean?"

(12) "But, let's come back to the money." They were off on something else here, desperate to get away from the money; bored to death with the continual references to the money. "A million dollars and so forth and so on. Let me say that I think you could get that in cash."

(13) "That's why your immediate thing . . . you've got no choice with Hunt but \$120 or whatever it is. Right?"

(14) "Would you agree that this is a buy-time thing? You'd better damn well get that done, but fast."

(15) "Now, who's gonna talk to him? Colson?"

(16) "We have no choice."

And, so on. Now, reading as you've requested, n.n. A. All right, fine. Q. . . . Within the whole context, that is

Reading Out of Context

A. Let me, let me just stop you right there. Right there. You're doing something here which I am not doing, and I will not do throughout these broadcasts. You have every right to. You were reading there out of context, out of order, because I have read this and I know . . . Q. Oh, I know. A. . . . It really better than you do. Q. I'm sure you do.

A. And I should know it better because I was there. It's no reflection on you. You know it better than anybody else I know, incidentally, and you're doing it very well. But I am not going to sit here and read the thing back to you. I could have notes here; as you know, I've participated on all of these broadcasts without a note in front of me. I've done it all from recollection. I may have made some mistakes.

Q. No, you . . . A. But not many. Q. . . . I . . . you certainly have done that . . . A. Now, let me say this, and let me say . . . Q. . . . And I agree with you, it's your life we're talking about.

A. . . . That in this instance, that in this instance, the very last thing you read, "Do you ever have any choice with Hunt?" It . . . why didn't you

read the next sentence? Why did you leave it off? Q. It carried on.

A. No, no. The reason . . . the next sentence says, as I remember that so well, "But, you never have a choice with Hunt. Do you ever have one?" Rhetorically, you never have a choice with Hunt. Because, when you finally come down to it, it gets down to clemency. Now, why, after all of that horror story? And it was, I mean, even considering that, I mean, must horrify people. Why would you consider paying money to somebody who's blackmailing the White House? I've tried to give you my reasons. I was concerned about what he would do. But, my point is: after that, why not? Why not do what was not done by Mr. Jaworski in his book? What was not done by Mr. [John M.] Doar (chief counsel of the House Judiciary Committee) before the Senate Judiciary Committee? Read the last sentence, the last sentence, which says, after that, "You never have any choice with Hunt, because it finally comes down to clemency." And, I said six times in that conversation, you didn't read that in your 10 things, six times I said, "You can't provide clemency."

Q. No, I said . . . A. "It's wrong

ior sure." Q. No, I never said there . . . I never said there that you did provide clemency, nor was I talking about . . .

A. My point is . . . Q. . . . But, I was . . . A. My point is . . .

Q. . . . All right, let me quote . . . A. My point is that without . . .

Last Quote on the Transcripts

Q. . . . Let me quote to you then—I've been through the record, I want to be totally fair—and let me read to you the last quote on the transcripts, that I can find about this matter then. You said, "Why didn't I go to the last one?" I read 16 and I thought that was enough, but . . . we could have read many more than that. But, the last thing in the transcripts I can find about this subject was: You talking on April the 20th, and you were recollecting this meeting and you said that you said to Dean and to Haldeman, "Christ, turn over any cash we got." That's your recollection of the meeting, on April 20 when you didn't know you were on television.

A. Of course I didn't know I was on television. On April the 20th, it could well have been my recollection. But, my point is: I wonder why, again, we haven't followed up with what happened after the meeting? Let me tell you what happened after the meeting. And you were, incidentally, very fair to point out—and the record clearly shows—that Dean did not follow up in any way on this. The payment that was made . . . Dean didn't know it. I didn't know it. Nobody else knew it, apparently, was being made contemporaneously that day through another source.

Q. The next . . . the next . . . A. Yeah.

Q. The next morning, Mitchell told Haldeman that it had been paid.

A. Yeah.

Q. And in a later transcript you agree with Haldeman, that he told you. You say, you say, "Yes, you reported that to me."

A. Yes. I understand.

Q. You were very soon aware it had gone through.

A. That's right. But my point is: The question we have is whether or not the payment was made as a result of a direction given by the President for that purpose. And, the point is: It was not. And the point is that the next morning—you talk about the conversation, and here again you probably don't have it on your notes here, but on the 22d, I raised the whole question of payments. And I said, and I'm compressing it all so we don't take too much of our time on this, I said:

"As far as these fellows in jail are concerned, you can help them for humanitarian reasons, but you can't pay—but that Hunt thing goes too far. That's just damn blackmail."

It would have been damn blackmail if Dean had done it. Now, that's in the record. And that's certainly an indication that it wasn't paid.

Conversation With Haldeman

Q. But later on that day at some point, according to your later words to Haldeman, you were told that it had been paid.

A. I agree that I was told that it had been paid. But what I am saying here is that the charge has been made that I directed it, and that it was paid as a result of what I said at that meeting.

That charge is not true, and it's proved by the tapes, which in so many cases, can be damaging. In this case, they're helpful.

Q. Well, there's two concerns to be said to that. One is: I think that the, the, my reading of the tapes tells me, trying to read in an openminded way, that the writing, not just between the lines, but on so many of the lines that I quoted, is very, very clear: that you were in fact, endorsing at least the short-term solution of paying this sum of money to buy time. That would be my reading of it.

But the other point to be said is: Here's Dean, talking about his hush-

money for Hunt; talking about blackmail and all of that. I would say that you endorsed to ratify it. But let's leave that on one side—

A. I didn't endorse or ratify it.

Q. Why didn't you stop it?

A. Because at that point I had nothing to—no knowledge of the fact that it was going to be paid. I'd had no knowledge of the fact that the, what you have mentioned in the transcript of the next day, where Mitchell said he "thought it'd been taken care of."

I think that was what the words were or words to that effect. I wasn't there. I didn't, I don't remember what he said. That was only reported to me.

'It's a Mistake'

The point that I make is this: It's possible, it's a mistake that I didn't stop it. The point that I make is that I did consider it. I've told you that I considered it. I considered it for reasons that I thought were very good ones. I would not consider it for the other reasons, which would have been in my view, bad ones.

Q. But that night, though, the night of the 21st. I mean, in the conversation with Colson after you'd been exchanging dialogue about getting off the reservation, and so on, Colson said to you something about the fact that "it's the stuff after the cover-up. I don't care

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about the people involved in the cover-up; it's the stuff after that's dangerous. Dean and other things, and the things that have been done."

And, you said, as I'm sure you know: "You mean with regard to the defendants. Of course, that was, that had to be done. (Brackets, Laughs)." Whatever that means. But, I mean, so that night you were saying that had to be done. You were realizing that doing something for the defendants was a necessity.

A. No, I don't interpret that that way at all.

Q. How do you recall it?

A. I can't recall that, I can't recall that conversation, and I can't vouch for the, the accuracy of the transcription, on that. But I do say—

'An Exhibit of the Trial'

Q. That's absolutely—it's an exhibit of the Watergate trial.

A. Ah, that, the statements, the tapes that have been made public on the 22d with regard to my, and the one on the 21st as well, with regard to the whole payments problem, ah, I think, are very clear with regard to my attitude.

Q. But on the short term point, that was an exhibit, and part of the basic file at the trial was that conversation—Colson saying, "It's the stuff after that's dangerous." And, you saying, "You mean with regard to the defendants. Of course that was, that had to be done. [Laughs]."

I mean, that's absolutely on the record and authenticated and played publicly.

A. Well, I can't interpret it at this time.

Q. One of the other things that people find very difficult to take in the Oval Office on March the 21st, is the, is the coaching that you gave Dean and Haldeman on how to deal with the Grand Jury without getting caught, and saying that, "perjury's a tough rap to prove," as you'd said earlier, "just be damned sure you say, 'I don't remember. I can't recall.'"

Is that the sort of conversation that ought to have been going on in the Oval Office, do you think?

A. I think that kind of advice is proper advice for one who, as I was at that time, beginning to put myself in the position of an attorney for the defense—something that I wish I hadn't felt I had the responsibility to, to do.

But I would like the opportunity, when the question arises, to tell you

As many as 20 million additional viewers were expected to have tuned in for a portion—at least six minutes' worth—of the 90-minute telecast.

The program became fully sponsored shortly before air time, with Gallo Wines and the movie "Black Sunday" purchasing the remaining two 30-second spots on the special ad hoc network organized for Mr. Frost by Syndicast Services.

Those advertisers bought time only in the first program, however, and two national spots remain unsold for the three subsequent Frost-Nixon telecasts.

Ratings Available Today

Official ratings will become available today for the nation's three largest cities—New York, Chicago and Los Angeles—and those for the rest of the country will be reported by Nielsen and Arbitron in a day or two.

The audience projections for last night's telecast were based on expectations that it would have achieved an average rating of 22.5 on the 155 stations on which it was carried.

Mr. Frost's special network does not cover as much of the country as the major commercial networks; it has about 50 fewer stations than either CBS or NBC, and 30 fewer than ABC.

However, all but 14 of the 155 stations carrying the Nixon interviews are affiliated with the major networks. Thus, the networks will be hurt not only by the competition from the programs but also by the loss of many of their stations on the nights of the Frost-Nixon broadcasts.

'News Bonanza of the Year'

"This has turned out to be the biggest news bonanza of the year for television, and it's surely going to be the highest-rated syndicated program in history," said Mitchell Johnson, president of Syndicast.

"I think it's going to prove that if you have the right program, you can put together a national network for it," he continued. "Stations that turned up their noses at the Nixon interviews at first were very anxious to have the programs during the last month or so."

Mr. Johnson said he was certain that the remaining commercial spots for each of the programs could be sold at the last minute, if necessary.

The national spots, valued at \$62,500 each, represent one source of income from the telecasts for Mr. Frost and his investors. With a total of 10 half-minute spots for the network to sell in each program, the four telecasts have potential revenues of \$2.5 million.

The special network was set up under a barter arrangement in which the stations were given the programs free in exchange for their airtime. The stations make their money from selling seven local minutes of commercials. Each of the programs has been edited to provide for both national and local spots.

\$600,000 Fee for Nixon

Under Mr. Frost's agreement with Mr. Nixon, the former President is to receive a fee of \$600,000 for granting the interviews and a 10 percent share of the profits.

In addition to the revenues from the sale of network spots, Mr. Frost's organization has realized about \$1 million from the sale of the programs to foreign broadcast systems. Substantial amounts have also come from the sale of the radio rights to the Mutual Broadcasting System and the 16-millimeter nontheatrical film (educational rights to Universal Pictures).

Foreign systems will carry the telecasts one day after they are broadcast here. Among the nations that have purchased the series are Britain, Canada, Australia, France, Italy, Ireland, Denmark, Finland and Colombia.

"It's all worked out beautifully," Marvin Minoff, executive vice president of Mr. Frost's Paradine Productions, said yesterday. "We took a large gamble and had huge expenses, but now we're definitely in the black."

"There were a lot of skeptics when we started this, but we were always optimistic that we could bring it off," he added. "Now we wait and see what the reaction will be and what the ratings will show."



David Frost and Richard M. Nixon, the former President in San Clemente, Calif. John Bryson

limited, and then you're going to rely on that document, and so you're going to be able to blame it on Dean. And, it seems to me that, that is consistent with all the quotes that I have quoted, and not the open-door quote that you have quoted.

A. That's your opinion, and I have my opinion. Dean was sent to write a report. He worked on it, and he certainly would have remembered, ah, a phrase that was, let me say, a lot more easy to understand than "modified hang-out" or whatever Ehrlichman said. He would have remembered, "If it opens doors, it opens doors."

I meant by that I was prepared to hear the worst as well as the good.

And he says, "I disagree with your decision totally." He said, "I think it's going to eventually, you're going to live to regret it, but I will."

Ehrlichman then came in. I knew that Ehrlichman was butter because he felt very strongly he shouldn't resign. Although, he'd even indicated that Haldeman should go and maybe he should stay. And I took Ehrlichman out on the porch at Aspen—you've never been to Aspen, I suppose.

That's the Presidential Cabin at Camp David, and it was springtime. The tulips had just come out. I'll never forget, we looked out across—it was one of those gorgeous days when, you know, no clouds were on the mountain. And, I was pretty emotionally wrought-up, and I remember that I could just

'But I dearly remember, and you undoubtedly have it in your notes there, my saying that the White House 'can't do it, I thing, for my, was my last words.'

hardly bring myself to tell Ehrlichman that he had to go because I knew that he was going to resist it.

I said, "You know, John, when I went to bed last night . . ." He said, "I hoped."

I said, "I hoped, I almost prayed I wouldn't wake up this morning."

Well, it was an emotional moment. I think there were tears in our eyes, both of us.

He said, "Don't say that." We went

back in. They agreed to leave, and so it was late, but I did it. I cut off one arm and then cut off the other arm. Now, I can be faulted, I recognize it. Maybe I defended them too long; maybe I tried to help them too much, but I was concerned about them. I was concerned about their families. I felt that they in their hearts felt they were not guilty. I felt they ought to have a chance at least to prove that they were not guilty, and I didn't want to be in the position of just sawing them off in that way.

Refers to Gladstone

And, I suppose you could sum it all up the way one of your British Prime Ministers summed it up, Gladstone, when he said that "the first requirement for a Prime Minister is to be a good butcher." Well, I think the great story as far as summary of Watergate is concerned, I, ah, I did some of the big things rather well.

I screwed up terribly in what was a little thing and became a big thing. But I still have to admit, I wasn't a good butcher.

Q. Would you go further than "mistakes"? That, you've explained how you got caught up in this thing. You've explained your motives. I don't want to quibble about any of that. But just coming to the sheer substance, would you go further than "mistakes"? The word, it seems, is not enough for people to understand.

A. Well, what would you express?

Q. My goodness, that's a, I think that there are three things, since you asked me, I would like to hear you say—I think the American people would like to hear you say. One is:

"There was probably more than mistakes, there was wrongdoing." Whether it was a crime or not. Yes, it may have been a crime too.

Secondly, "I did—" And I'm saying this without questioning the motives, right? "I did abuse the power I had as President, or, ah, not fulfill the totality of the oath of office." That's the second thing.

And thirdly, "I put the American people through two years of needless agony, and I apologize for that." And I say that you've explained your motives.

'Haunted for Life'

I think those are the categories. And, I know how difficult it is for anyone, and most of all you, but I think that people need to hear it, and I think unless you say it you're going to be haunted for the rest of your life.

A. I well remember that when I let

Haldeman and Ehrlichman know that they were to resign, that I had Ray Price [a Presidential speech writer] bring in the final draft of the speech that I was to make the next night. And, I said to him, "Ray," I said, "If you think I ought to resign," I said, "put that in, too, because I feel responsible."

Even though I did not feel that I had engaged in these activities consciously, insofar as the knowledge of, or participation in, the break-in; the approval of hush-money; the approval of clemency, et cetera. The various charges that have been made.

Well, he didn't put it in. And I must say that at that time, I seriously considered whether I shouldn't resign. But on the other hand, I feel that I owe it to history to point out that from that time on, April 30th, until I resigned on August 9th, I did some things that were good for this country. We had the second and third summits. I think one of the major reasons I stayed in office was my concern about keeping the China initiative, the Soviet initiative, the Vietnam fragile peace agreement and the, an, added dividend—the first, breakthrough in not love, but at least not war in the Mid-East.

And now, coming back to the whole point of, ah, whether I should have resigned then, and how I feel now. Let me say, I, I just didn't make mistakes in this period. I think some of my mistakes that I regret most deeply came with the statements that I made afterwards.

Some of those statements were misleading. I notice, for example, the editor of The Washington Post, the managing editor, Ben Bradlee, wrote a couple or three months ago something to the effect that as far as his newspaper was concerned, he said, "We don't print the truth. We print what we know. We print what people tell us, and this means that we print lies."

I would say that the statements that I made afterwards were, on the big issues, true; that I was not involved in the matters that I have spoken to, about—not involved in the break-in; that I did not engage in the, and participate in, or approve the payment of money or the authorization of clemency, which of course were the essential elements of the cover-up. That was true.

But the statements were misleading in exaggerating, in that enormous political attack I was under. It was a five-front war with a fifth column. I had a partisan Senate Committee staff. We had a partisan Special Prosecutor staff. We had a partisan media. We had a partisan judiciary committee staff in the fifth column.

Admits Speaking Falsely

Now under all these circumstances, my reactions in some of the statements and press conferences and so forth after that, I want to say right here and now, I said things that were not true. Most of them were fundamentally true on the big issues, but without going as far as I should have gone, and saying perhaps that I had consid-

ered other things, but had not done them.

And for all those things I have a very deep regret.

Q. You got caught up in something—

A. Yeah.

Q. And then it snowballed.

Q. What I don't understand about March the 21st is that I still don't know why you didn't pick up the phone and tell the cops. I still don't know when you found about the things that Haldeman and Ehrlichman had done, that there is no evidence anywhere of a rebuke, but only of scenarios and excuses, et cetera. Nowhere do you say, "We must get this information direct to . . ." whoever it is, the head of the Justice Department, criminal investigation, or whatever. And nowhere do you say to Haldeman and Ehrlichman, "This is disgraceful conduct," and Haldeman

admits a lot of it the next day, so you're not relying on Dean. "You're fired."

A. Well, could I take my time now to, to address that question? Q. Hmmm. A. Ah, I think it will be very useful to, you know, what I, what I was going through. It wasn't a very easy time. I think my daughter once said, that there really wasn't a happy time in the White House, except in a personal sense, after April 30th, when Haldeman and Ehrlichman left. You know, it's rather difficult to tell you, four years later, how you felt.

The Sherman Adams Problem

But I think you'd like to know. Something new. You see, I had been through a, a very difficult period when President Eisenhower had the (Sherman) Adams problem. [Mr. Adams, who was chief of staff in the Eisenhower White House, was forced to resign in 1958 because of allegations of impropriety stemming from his acceptance of gifts from a businessman friend.] And I'll never forget the agony he went through. Here was Adams, a man that had gone through the heart attack with him, a man that had gone through the stroke with him, a man that had gone through the ileitis with him, a man who had been totally selfless, but he was caught up in a web. Guilty? I don't know.

I considered Adams then to be an honest man in his heart; he did have some misjudgment, but, in any event, finally Eisenhower decided, after months of indecision on it, and he stood up for him in press conferences over and over again, and [James C.] Hagerly [President Eisenhower's press secretary] did; he decided he had to go. You know who did it? I did it. Eisenhower called me in and asked me to talk to Sherrin.

And here was the situation I was faced with: Who's going to talk to these men? What can we do about it? Well, first, let me say that I didn't have anybody that could talk to them but me. I couldn't have [then Vice President Spiro T.] Agnew talk to them, because they didn't get along well with him. Bill Rogers [then Secretary of State] wasn't happy with them either, and so, not having a Vice President or anybody else. And Haldeman, my chief of staff himself being one involved, the only man that could talk to them was me.

Conversation With Petersen

Now, when I did talk to them, it was one of the most, ah, I would say difficult periods, heart-rendering—hard to use the adjectives that are adequate—experiences of my life. I'll never forget when I heard that, on April 15th from Henry Petersen [then Assistant Attorney General, who headed the Justice Department's Watergate inquiry], that they ought to resign and (Richard D.) Kleindienst [former Attorney General] thought they ought to resign, and it took me two weeks . . . I frankly agreed, incidentally, in my own mind that they had to go on the basis of the evidence that had been presented.

Ah, but I didn't tell them that at that point. I went I say, "I agreed with it." I didn't fully reach that conclusion, because I still wanted to give them a chance to survive. I didn't want to have them sacked as Eisenhower sacked Adams, and then have . . . and Adams goes off to New Hampshire and runs a ski lodge and is never prosecuted for anything; sacked because of misjudgment, yes; mistakes, yes; but an illegal act, with an immoral, illegal motive? No. That's what I felt about Adams, and that's the way I felt about these men at that time.

Now let me tell you what happened. I remembered Henry Petersen coming in on that Sunday afternoon. He came in off his boat. He apologized for being in his sneakers and pair of blue jeans, and so forth, but it was very important to give me the update on what had



Mr. Nixon autographing a picture of himself taken by a neighbor

John Bryson

. . . the developments that had occurred up to April 15. And, he said . . . he gave me a piece of paper indicating that they had knowledge of Haldeman's participation and the \$350,000, and they had knowledge of Ehrlichman's participation in ordering or . . . what they indicated that Ehrlichman had, had, told Hunt to deep . . . told the, ah, [L. Patrick] Gray [then Acting Director of the F.B.I.] to deep-six . . . some papers, and so forth and so on. And he said, "Mr. President, these men have got to resign. You've got to fire 'em."

'A Conspiracy to Get You'

And I said to him, I said, "But Henry, I can't fire men simply on the basis of charges; they've got to have their day in court, they've got to have a chance to prove their innocence. I've got to see more than this, because they claim that they're not guilty." And Henry Petersen, very uncharacteristically, because he's very respectful—a Democrat, career Civil Service, splendid man—sat back in his chair and he said, "You know, Mr. President, what you've just said, that you can't fire a man simply on the basis of charges that have been made and the fact that they . . . their continued service will be embarrassing to you, you've got to have proof before you do that." He said: "That speaks very well for you as a man. It doesn't speak well for you as a President." And, in retrospect, I guess he was right.

So, it took me two weeks to work it out, tortuous long sessions. You've got hours and hours of talks with them, which they resisted. We don't need to go through all that agony. And, I remember the day at Camp David when they came up. Haldeman came in first,

he's standing as he usually does, not a Germanic Nazi storm trooper, but just a decent, respected crew-cut guy. That's the way Haldeman was; splendid man.

A. It snowballed. And, it was my fault. I'm not blaming anybody else. I'm simply saying to you that, as far as I'm concerned, I not only regret it; I indicated my own beliefs in this matter when I resigned. People didn't think it was enough to admit mistakes, fine. If they want me to get down and grovel on the floor, no. Never, because I don't

believe I should.

On the other hand, there are some friend who say, "Just face them down. There is a conspiracy to get you." There may have been. I don't know what the C.I.A. had to do. Some of their shenanigans have yet to be told, according to a book I read recently. I don't know what was going on in some Republican, some Democratic circles, as far as the so-called impeachment lobby was concerned. However, I don't go with the idea that there . . . that what brought me down was a coup, a conspiracy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

I brought myself down. I gave 'em a sword. And they stuck it in, and they twisted it with relish. And I guess if I'd been in their position, I'd have done the same thing.

Q. But, what I'm really saying is that: In addition to the untrue statements that you've mentioned, could you just say—with conviction, I mean, not because I want you to say it—that you did do some covering up? We're not talking legalistically now, I just want the facts. I mean, that you did do some covering up. That there were a series of times when maybe, overwhelmed by your loyalties, or whatever else, but as you look back at the record, you behaved partially protecting your friends, or, maybe yourself, and that, in fact, you were—to put it at its most simple—a part of a cover-up at times?

A. No, I . . . I again, I again respectfully will not quibble with you about the use of the terms. However, before using the term, I think it's very important for me to make clear what I did not do and what I did do. And then I will answer your questions quite directly. I did not, in the first place, commit a . . . the crime of obstruction of justice. Because I did not have the motive required for the commission of that crime.

Q. We've . . . we've had or discussion on that, and we disagree on that—

A. The lawyers can argue that. I did not commit, in my view, an impeachable offense. Now, the House has ruled overwhelmingly that I did; of course, that was only an indictment and would have to be tried in the Senate. I might have won. I might have lost. But, even if I'd won in the Senate by a vote or

'I think my daughter once said, that there really wasn't a happy time in the White House except in a personal sense.'

two, I would have been crippled and the . . . for six months the country couldn't afford having the President in the dock in the United States Senate, and there can never be an impeachment in the future in this country without voluntarily impeaching himself. I have impeached myself. That speaks for itself.

Q. How do you mean, "I have impeached myself"?

A Voluntary Impeachment

A. By resigning. That was a voluntary impeachment. And, now what does that mean in terms of whether I, ah . . . you're wanting me to say that I . . . participated in an illegal cover-up? No. Now, when you come to the period—and this is the critical period—that when you come to the period of March 21st, on, when Dean gave his legal opinion, that certain things, actions taken by Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, et cetera, and even by himself, amounted to a legal cover-up and so forth; then I was in a very different position, and during that period, I will admit that I started acting as lawyer for their defense.

I will admit that, acting as lawyer for their defense, I was not prosecuting the case. I will admit that during that period, rather than acting primarily in my role as the chief law enforcement officer in the United States of America, or at least with responsibility for the law enforcement, because the Attorney General is the chief law enforcement officer, but as the one with the chief responsibility for seeing that the laws of the United States are enforced, that I did not meet that responsibility. And, to the extent that I did not meet that responsibility, to the extent that within

the law, and in some cases going right to the edge of the law in trying to advise Ehrlichman and Haldeman and all the rest as to how best to present their cases—because I thought they were legally innocent—that I came to the edge and, under the circumstances, I would have to say that a reasonable person could call that a cover-up.

I didn't think of it as a cover-up. I didn't intend it to cover up. Let me say, if I intended to cover up, believe me, I'd have done it. You know how I could have done it? So easily? I could have done it immediately after the election, simply by giving clemency to everybody, and the whole thing would have gone away. I couldn't do that because I said, "Clemency was wrong."

But now we come down to the key point. And let me answer it my own way about, "How do I feel about the American people?" I mean, how, ah, whether I should have resigned earlier, or what I should say to them now. Well, that forces me to rationalize now and give you a carefully prepared and cropped statement. I didn't expect this question, frankly though, so I'm not going to give you that, but I can tell you this . . . Q. Nor did I.

Some Difficult Meetings

A. . . . I can tell you this: I think I said it all, in, in one of those moments that, that you're not thinking. Sometimes you say the things that are really in your heart. When you're thinking in advance, then you say things, you know, that are tailored to the audience. I had a lot of difficult meetings—those last days before I resigned, and the most difficult one and the only one where I broke into tears, frankly, except for that very brief session with Ehrlichman up at Camp David; it was the first time I cried since Eisenhower died. I met with all of my key supporters just a half-hour before going on television.

For 25 minutes, we all sat around in the Oval Office; men that I'd come to Congress with, Democrats and Republicans, about half and half, wonderful men. And, at the very end, after saying, "Well, thank you for all your support during these tough years. Thank you for the, ah, particularly for what you've done to help us end the draft, and bring home the P.O.W.'s and have a chance for building a generation of peace, which I could see the, the dream that I had possibly being shattered. And, thank you for your friendship, little acts of friendship over the years, you know, you sort of remember, you know, with a birthday card and the rest.

Then, suddenly, you haven't got much more to say, and half the people around the table were crying. [Representative] Les Arends, Illinois, bless him, he was shaking, sobbing, and ah, I get, I just can't stand seeing somebody else cry, and that ended it for me. And I just, well, I must say, I sort of choked up; started to cry; pushed my chair back, and then I blurted it out, and I said: "I'm sorry. I just hope I haven't left you . . . let you down."

'That Said It All'

Well, when I said, "I just hope I haven't let you down," that said it all. I had. I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government and the dreams of all these young people that ought to get into government, but think it's all too corrupt and the rest.

Most of all, I let down an opportunity that I would have had for two and a half more years to proceed on great projects and programs for building a lasting peace, which has been my dream, as you know from our first interview in 1968, before I had any . . . thought I might even win that year. I didn't tell you I didn't think I might win, but I wasn't sure. Yep, I . . . I let the American people down, and I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life. My political life is over. I will never yet, and never again have an opportunity to serve in any official position. Maybe I can give a little advice from time to time.

And so, I can only say that in answer to your question, that while technically, I did not commit a crime, an impeachable offense . . . these are legalisms, as far as the handling of this matter is concerned; it was so botched up. I made so many bad judgments. The worst one, mistakes of the heart, rather than the head, as I pointed out. But let me say, a man in that top judge . . . top job—he's got to have a heart, but his head must always rule his heart.

Q. This has, ah . . . this has been more . . . A. Been tough for you? (laughter)

Q. Well, no, but I was going to say that I feel we've . . . A. Covered a lot of ground.

Q. . . . Been through life almost, rather than in interview, and, we thank you.