24 November 1973

Dear Harold:

Herewith a dub of Nixon's 17nov73 exchange with the APME crowd at Disney World, since you've erased your own.

He gives 17Mar73 as the date he first learned of the breakin of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. This is the same date given in a WH statement issued on 16Aug73, in connection with a radio-TV speech he had given the day before, 15Aug73, in which he did not mention the date. This corrects an earlier Nixon statement on 17Apr73 that he had first learned of it on 21Mar73.

The dub also will provide you with the quote you wanted on what he said about flying in Air Force 1 without a backup plane: "If it goes down, it goes down -- and then they don't have to impeach."

I think you misread my 15Nov73 on Nixon appearing to dare Congress to impeach him. Let me say it again: what he is after is an early decision, in his favor, of course. Naturally he does not want to be impeached and as you point out has been engaged in continual stalling to prevent it.

This means he is running on two apparently unrelated tracks but both of which are part of the same strategy. As he stalls and blocks and creates delays, at the same time he is goading the House to make a quick decision on whether to impeach him, knowing that the sooner this happens the likelier the whole idea will be abandoned. Later, after more disclosures, it will be much less likely. And if he can get it cut off in the House before a vote is taken on returning a bill of impeachment, this would be a decisive victory because it would cut off the only constitutional process provided for getting rid of a an undesirable official. This process always could be revived, but the precedent of a negative vote the first time would operate against success. From his standpoint, the sooner the House can be maneuvered into abandoning the idea of impeachment, the better off he'll be, the freer his hand from then on. This would seem far preferable to allowing the process to reach an actual vote on a bill of impeachment, or a later trial in the Senate. I see no conflict here with your ideas.

Meanwhile, I think as time goes on and as his erratic behavior continues the chances become better for something you suggested a while back: a coup by others using Nixon as a front. This is a very mixed bag, of course, with a lot of factors we only can guess at, but there's no disagreement here that things are getting very dangerous. At the moment, it would seem that he is so hard pressed that there probably is less likelihood of his trying a coup himself than might have been the case earlier: the military well could think twice before allowing itself to be used. However, the using of him, unpopular as he has become and will become still further, might look differently to men like Moorer. Too bad we don't know more about some of these guys.

One good thing operating in favor of sanity is the way the talk of a coup has become open and general. Lil's friend who mentioned talk of it in the DIA is a good example. Meanwhile, as we dip into talk shows here now and then there usually is come caller who will discuss the possibility with casual candor, as if everyone knows the possibility and no one boggles at it. This can only be good, since general awareness of the possibility should, in general, make planning and staging of a coup more difficult.

Best.// idw