In Which Mr. Ziegler Gives a Briefing

On Watergate and Other Matters

Drawing by John Twohey

The Washington Post OUTLOOK

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The following excerpts are from a press briefing last Wednesday, April 25, by White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler.

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Q: *Has the Attorney General resigned? Has he submitted his resignation?*

A: Mr. Kleindienst?

Q: *Yes.*

A: No, he has not.

Q: *Who was the secret visitor to the Florida White House?*

A: Let me just say before we begin the question period that in relation to the subjects which you have been asking Jerry [Warren] about, specifically the Watergate situation, I am really not prepared today to be responsive in any detail to your questions based upon the same proposition or premise that I put to you the other day before we left for Florida.

At some point we will be able and do intend to be more responsive to your questions, but—

Q: *When will that be, Ron?*

A: In terms of your question, Helen, I mentioned yesterday to the pool on the airplane that Pat Buchanan came down for a few days and that he talked to the President, about a number of matters, but, as I pointed out he talked about this subject also, but he was not there for the purpose of preparing a speech. I wanted to make that clear, because of his title as being the President's writer. He was one of the staff people in Florida over the holiday period. I was then asked on Air Force One as to whether or not anyone else came to Florida, and I wanted to say that I could not be responsive to that question and I can't today. But I do stand on what I said last night. I don't want you to draw any massive conclusions from that fact I can't respond.

Q: *Ron, why can't you be responsive to that? Is it a matter of national security?*

A: No, it is not. It's a matter of if there's an individual I cannot refer to specifically, as the question suggests, it's because the President wanted to meet with him privately.

Q: *The President met with Dr. Kissinger and Mr. Shultz?*

A: Yes. I should add that he will be meeting with other members of the staff. I'm sure Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and I met with him today, and others will be seeing him also.

Q: *Dean? John Dean?*

Q: *The President met with Ehrlichman and Haldeman today?*

A: I believe he intends to. He does on most days.

Q: *On what, do you know?*

A: Well, on a number of subjects, I suppose.

Q: *You said that at some point you're going to be responsive. Can you put a timetable on that? Is that after the grand jury acts?*

A: No, I really can't put a timetable on this, except I can say to you again, as we said the other day, following the President's statement on April 17th, and that is that he intends to get to the bottom of this matter. He's working on it, and at a time where it is felt that I can be—we can be—responsive to questions, I will do so, but I'm not in a position to do that today.

Q: *In that statement there was some ambiguous language about no immunity for White House personnel, and this might have have had a chilling effect on the possibility of some people coming forward with the promise of immunity and testifying freely. Was this deliberate ambiguity in the President's statement?*

A: Well, I can't amplify on the President's statement of the 17th.

Q: *Could you tell us, this is a question we asked Jerry over the last couple of days in your absence, can you tell us when the President became aware of the new material, the additional information that prompted him to launch his investigation?*

A: Well, I think Jerry did respond to that to the degree that . . .

Q: *He simply referred us to the President's statement, Ron, and the President's statement does not address this question.*

A: Well, I think the best answer I can offer you today is simply this: As the President said, on March 21st, he proceeded with what he is referring to as his personal involvement in the investigation.

Now, as to what point during that period he received, as a result of those efforts, information that led to the April 17th statement, which referred to new developments, I can't specifically say. But I also don't want to imply that all of a sudden on the 21st of March that he received an all-inclusive set of information that led to his activities on the 21st on it.

I would say that it happened probably more in the way [that] as information came to him leading up to the 21st, it led him to the conclusion on the 21st that he wanted to proceed as he announced on April 17th he had proceeded and then moved in that direction with his personal involvement in looking into this matter. He has been doing that since that time. He continues to spend time on this subject, as well as other matters and, as I said, intends to get to the bottom of this and to have the facts come out.

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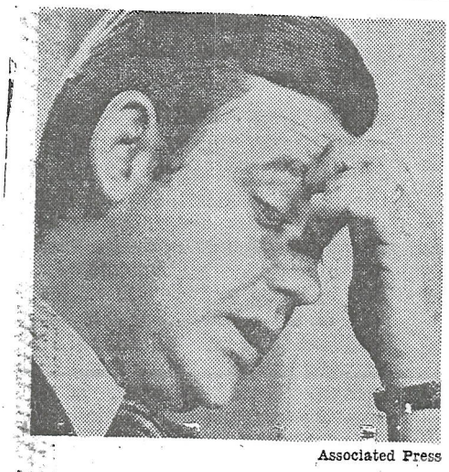

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ZIEGLER, From Page C1

Q: *Ron, the reason I'm asking the question is there have been reports that as early as last December and as early as August, the President was told that the White House involvement, the involvement by White House staffers in this Watergate business was extensive, much more extensive than he had been told before. Why did he wait until the grand jury was ready to indict before acting? That is the thrust of my question.*

A: I understand. I think Jerry covered that, but if he didn't I'll cover it again today. I don't feel that I can, at this time, get into any extensive discussions of the process the President has followed, going beyond his April 17th statement. However, I can say to you, as I think Jerry said yesterday in Florida, any suggestion that the President had knowledge, such as you refer to that was contained in the reports at that time, or that someone warned him about this matter, is not correct.

During 1972, I think you well know, the President was involved in the many activities of the presidency, which I don't have to refer to—two summit meetings, the Vietnam situation, and the rest—and was depending on the ongoing investigations that were taking place.

So, I would be responsive to your question to a limited degree by saying that reports that suggest matters which you refer to in your question are not correct.

Q: *Ron, why wasn't the President warned in 1972?*

A: Well, here again, Donald, I simply don't feel that I can be responsive to a series of questions in that regard at this point, but I did want to offer an answer to the limited degree that I have.

Q: *Are you ruling out he was ever told in 1972? We have to pinpoint this in some way. You are saying that he was never warned, so on March 21 he starts new inquiry, but there is some point at which you are starting your premise.*

A: There is some point where I am starting my premise, you're correct. I stand on the answer I gave . . . I cannot be more specific in terms of the matters that led up to the 21st decision. But I can tell you, as I said before, and as Jerry said, that he was not warned back in August of 1972, he had no knowledge such as the report which led to the question suggests.

I can't go beyond that, because I do not personally have all of the detailed facts available to me regarding the process that the President has followed from March 21st on.

Q: *There is a report about something being sidetracked. Was such a warning sidetracked?*

A: I can't be specific to these types of questions at this point. At some point in the future, we will be able to perhaps be responsive to some, but I simply can't today.

Q: *Has Pat Buchanan handed in his resignation?*

A: No, he has not.

Q: *Who? Who? Who?*

Q: *Is there a possibility that—*

A: Just a moment. The question is that has Pat Buchanan submitted his resignation yet. Absolutely not. I don't want to go down the list of people. I'll just make an overall statement.

The status of the White House staff is the same as I indicated it was before the President left for Florida. There has been no change in the status of the White House staff.

Q: *What about former presidential aides or assistants who are now out in the various agencies of the government? Have there been changes or resignations among them, like Fred Malek or others of his status?*

A: Fred Malek is in the OMB.

Q: *Yes, but what about others like him who have left the White House group and gone to various agencies?*

A: I don't . . . I don't have the basis of information to answer that.

Q: *Do you anticipate any changes, before the grand jury makes its report, in the White House staff?*

A: I would just say that I cannot anticipate, I am not in a position to anticipate, and by saying that, I don't want to leave things open in your mind. I can simply respond to you by saying there is no change

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in the status of the White House staff. I don't mean to suggest action will follow that comment. I simply can tell you that there has been no change in the White House staff and I'm not prepared to anticipate any.

Q: *From what you have said earlier, and what you have said recently, one has to assume that when John Mitchell resigned, he did not even at that time cue in the President on what conversations he had had in regard to the Watergate bugging plans. Is that a correct assumption?*

A: Courtney, there are a number of assumptions, as this matter unfolds, and is reported on, as it should be. I simply can't—based upon what I said to you previously, and based upon the knowledge that I personally have available to me—I cannot be responsive at this time to specific questions such as that, particularly following the President's April 17th statement on which he proceeded.

However, I would call your attention in response to that question to my answer to Mr. Rischer earlier.

Q: *I have a question which goes to your credibility as a spokesman for the President.*

A: Yes, sir.

Q: *Mindful of what you said about how assorted information was gathered between March 21st and March 30th and April 17th, on March 30th you came out here and made a long opening statement at a briefing in which you said in part, "The President, as you recall, called for an investigation of members of the White House staff regarding the Watergate matter. As we have said before, no one in the White House had any involvement or prior knowledge of that event. I repeat that statement today." My question is, Was that statement a lie or was that statement intended to mislead us?*

A: Well, I made a number of long statements during that period, as you recall. I can only say that any comment—and there will be a time, I assure you, for this subject to be discussed and to be raised. I don't want to—because I've taken the position that I've taken in the briefing in response to other questions on this matter—I don't want to move away from that position simply because the questions are addressed at matters such as that. I will simply say to you that, as I said before—and therefore this is a repeat of what I have said previously—anything that I offered here in response to a question was based on information that I had available to me to make such a statement.

Q: *That wasn't in answer to a question. That goes also to your opening statements?*

A: That's correct. Any statement or response to questions that I made here as a White House spokesman was based on the information that I had available to me to base such a statement or comments on at that time.

Q: *Well, Ron, you are saying that the President is trying to get to the bottom of Watergate. With that in mind, is he making progress, and if he is, can you characterize it for me?*

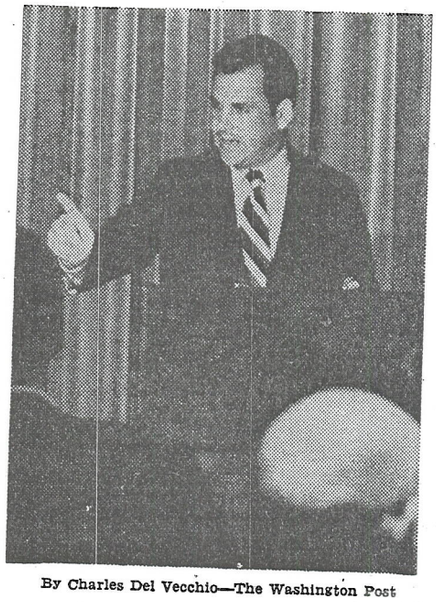
A: I don't know that I can characterize the progress, Cliff, because this is . . . although I have had extensive discussions with the President on this and other subjects, I don't think I'm in a position to characterize it in terms of progress. He is talking to Assistant Attorney General Petersen on a regular basis, and he is spending a good deal of time on this matter, but I don't want to attempt to characterize it.

Q: *Ron, would you characterize the scope of the investigation? That is, is it limited specifically to events directly related to Watergate, or does it involve other things, such as, to mention a few, the Vesco affair, or the misuse of—alleged misuse of—political campaign funds?*

A: Well, I hoped I had made this clear the other day. When I refer to and the President refers to personal involvement in this matter, that does not mean that he has —that he is the only one involved in the process of investigation. Now, there are, of course—there's the effort on the part of the Justice Department, the U.S. Attorney's office, there's the ongoing process in grand jury, I think both here and you referred to the Vesco thing. I think that relates to a grand jury proceeding elsewhere.

When I refer to the President's personal involvement in this, what I'm saying is that the President, as he stated in his April 17th statement, on March 21st personally involved himself in the process of saying, "I feel it is necessary that I personally involve myself in this matter here in the White House because it appears that that is called for, based upon information that has come to my attention." But that is not at all inclusive and the only investigation occurring, as I indicated in my earlier remarks in response to your question.

During this period following March 21st,



By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

he's had extensive discussions with members of his staff. He's asked members of his staff to obtain materials for him. He's asked members of the staff to find out things for him, and that is the process that he is going through.

Q: *Ron, are you one of the investigating group? Has he asked you to investigate anything?*

A: Excuse me?

Q: *Did he ask you to investigate anything?*

A: Well, I don't think that it would be appropriate for me to indicate who the President has asked on his staff to review any matter. I don't mean to suggest by that that he has asked me.

Q: *Has there been any change in your duties or responsibility?*

A: No, there's not. I happen to be the— Bob and John, as you know, stayed home over the Easter period and I happened to be the staff man there, so I was involved in an awful lot of work to be done down there and I was involved in that process, but that does not indicate any change in the duties that I am responsible for.

Q: *Why didn't the President get an outside prosecutor for this rather than investigating his own affairs?*

A: Well, here again, I don't want to be responsive at this time to a question like that.

Q: *Has the President asked for any resignations so far and have any been submitted or on his desk?*

A: Well, I've said repeatedly, Helen, that there has been no change in the staff since . . .

Q: *No, you didn't but that's not the question.*

A: There's no change in the White House staff.

Q: *Has he asked for any resignations?*

A: I understand your question and I heard it the first time and I want to go through my answer.

I said that there has been no change in the White House staff and there have been no resignations submitted.

Q: *Ron, has anyone offered to resign and the offer been declined by the President?*

A: I think what I've just said in response to the question is that there have been no resignations submitted.

Q: *Well, that's not the question. The question was have any resignations been offered and declined by the President?*

A: The answer to that is, not to my knowledge.

Q: *Does this mean that Mr. Haldeman, for example, is as of this moment still operating as the President's chief of staff here at the White House? And Mr. Ehrlichman is still the principal adviser for domestic affairs? And Mr. Dean still remains as counsel for the President?*

A: Mr. Dean?

Q: *Yes, Mr. Dean.*

A: It means that there has been no change in the . . . it means that there has been no change in the status of the White House staff, which would lead me to say that the question . . . answer to the question is yes, there has been no change in the White House staff and these men hold their positions.

Q: *May I follow up on that then? Why is that true? For example, in the case of Mr. Dean it's obvious on the public record, from Mr. Dean's own statements, that he has been involved, to put it in the most charitable way, in some of the misleading that has been going on around here. Now, why is Mr. Dean still on the public payroll, still in an office of high responsibility, next to the President, when that is on the public record and is a fact?*

A: Well, Dan, I can . . . I really can't answer the "why" part of your question, which goes to the point I made earlier. I'm simply not prepared today to do much in the way of specific responses.

Q: *Why?*

A: I am just not in a position to do so. I can answer your general question, Dan, in terms of the status of the White House staff, and that is that it remains as it was before.

Q: *Ron, beyond the status of the White House staff, though, the word "status" can be taken to imply the title is unchanged and the weekly salary is unchanged. Are their functions unchanged also?*

A: Well, I'm not prepared to break down my answers and so forth. I'll stand on what I've said.

Q: *Early last May when the President announced the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, and the mining of North Vietnam's harbors, you were asked about public response to that decision and you gave at that time some information with respect to the volume of telegrams you had received. You indicated these communications were heavily in favor of the President's decision. Did you know at that time that the Committee for the Re-Election of the President had paid for those telegrams?*

A: Here again, we get into specific questions, and I'm trying to force myself off of not being responsive to questions when they're aimed in my direction and not others. I, however, think that I should respond to just this one question, and that is, no, of course, I was not. We had checked, in response to a question, to find out what the volume of telegrams coming into the White House was, and we got that information from wherever the telegrams are received.

Now, let me just move off of that to make a point. And that is that I think, without being responsive beyond what I've said to that specific story that you ran this morning, I think the policy which the President has followed in terms of Vietnam, in terms of the decisions that he made in relation to Vietnam, despite telegrams, is supported and was supported and has been supported by the American people.

I think that is one judgment that can be made at this time, certainly without basing it on, as the story suggested, an $8,000 expenditure for telegrams. I don't know anything about that. But I do know about the President's policy in relation to Vietnam, the policy followed to bring the war to an end. And the policy he followed to bring the prisoners home, and all of the rest, and that has received support.

Q: *Are you saying, Ron, that the war in Vietnam is at an end?*

Q: *Leaving aside the question of Vietnam, whether it's really at an end or not, do you consider and does the President consider that a proper use of campaign contributions, that is to say, does he consider it proper for campaign contributions to be used to purchase telegrams on a clandestine basis supporting his policy in this or that or some other regard?*

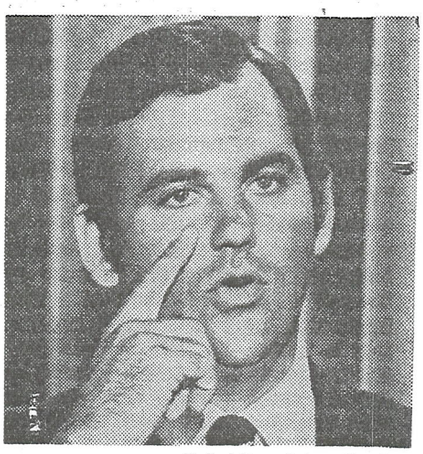
A: Jim, I really don't know the details of that story. I will not be responsive to it. I think at this time I just cannot be responsive to those types of questions because it would . . . in the swirl of things which we're involved in, virtually anything I say, in any of these areas, could lead you to misimpressions.

Q: *I would like to follow up on an earlier question of mine. You said that the reports which suggested that—and this is paraphrase—that the President was informed of the dimensions of White House involvement in the Watergate business early on are not correct. Does this mean that the statement that John Ehrlichman's interview with the Washington Star-News, in which he said that he pushed early on for full disclosure in this matter, is incorrect?*

A: Well, here again, Gene, I'm sorry but I cannot be more responsive to questions in this regard than I've been. And I cannot respond to that type of a question at this time.

Q: *You said earlier—someone asked you earlier about whether or not any resignations had been requested. And you didn't respond to the question. There was a report that there are two or three key officials who are not cooperating. This was attributed to a high administration official. Is there any truth to that? That the President feels that somebody is not cooperating?*

A: Well, that's a very broad, you know, area for me to respond to. Let me just respond to it the only way I can, and that



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is that the President has not indicated that to me, and that I am not aware of that type of situation. But that's the scope of my knowledge on the subject, Bob.

Q: *Has the President progressed far enough in his investigation to satisfy himself that there was a massive coverup by his aides on the staff of the Watergate affair and subsequent developments?*

A: I don't know, Peter. All I can say is that on April 17th, the President indicated that there were new developments. The specific matters which led him to that statement, I cannot address myself to in any specific details, and the process that he's involved in now, in relation to that statement, I cannot provide characterization of or specifics about.

Q: *Can you characterize for us the President's mood now?*

A: I hesitate only because what I'm about to say I'm afraid you're—I've seen the President involved in a number of difficult matters, difficult situations in the four or four and a half years he's been in office. And in each of these periods, or these times, I really have not detected, at least in my dealing and contacts with him and discussions with him, a change in mood as such. He is very much concentrating on this matter, as he concentrates on other matters of the presidency, and I would really hesitate to characterize his mood as such as anything other than that he is a man at work and a man involved in something that is taking a great deal of his time.

But as the President proceeds with his responsibilities and his work, he has always, as you know, been very . . . always concentrated and reflected a tone of concentrated work. I think that's the best way I could put it.

Q: *Is he not angry, sad, not feeling betrayed?*

A: I don't feel that I can project that type of a feeling on behalf of the President in this regard. I just don't think that—

Q: *You mean to say that he is not outraged by what he has been discovering in his investigation?*

A: I said that I'm not prepared to project, Peter, that type of a characterization of his attitude. I just don't think I should.

Q: *When you said . . .*

A: Will you give someone else a chance?

Q: *Ron, . . .*

A: Excuse me, we'll go back to you . . . go ahead please.

Q: *Earlier in this briefing someone raised the issue of your personal credibility and you, I thought, suggested that that would be a subject of fit discussion at some future date. I'm wondering in view of the critical importance of your personal credibility here if you would consider voluntarily appearing or sending a deposition under oath to either the federal grand jury or the Ervin select committee when it meets?*

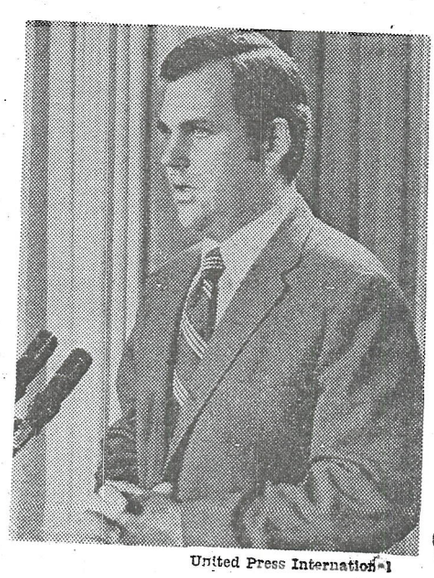
A: Well, that's something that's not come before me at this point. It has not come before me at all. This is the first reference to that, and I would simply stand on what I said earlier, in terms of the responses that I've given in behalf of the White House.

Q: *You characterized some of the President's activities as he pursues this investigation. Today you mentioned that he has asked staff members to find out things, and we have been told about his conversations with Henry Petersen, among others. Can you tell us whether in pursuing this investigation the President is in fact asking certain people, perhaps on his staff or others, specific questions about the involvement; that is to say, is he doing that first-hand?*

A: Well, I don't think I can add anything, Adam, to what I've already said in terms of the processes that he is following.

Q: *Could you clarify something, please? First you said, "I will have more details later," and then you changed that to "we," and you have been saying "The President has been studying this." You seem to be suggesting without saying it that the President himself may in fact have a full statement on Watergate to the public at some later date. Is it you who is going to answer the questions at a later date or is it the President?*

A: Well, I think the proper context to put my answer in is that it's not that I am aware of anything specifically that will happen. I was simply making the point in terms



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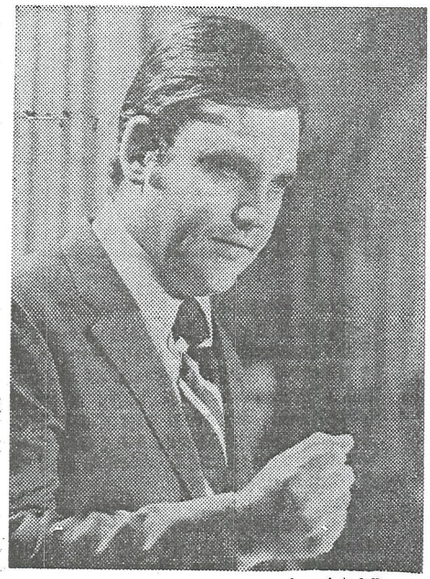

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of the position that I have to take today in response to specific questions, but it is a position that I trust will not be one that will be taken for all time.

Q: *But when you said "we," who is "we"? Meaning you personally will answer questions here or the President will answer questions and make a statement on Watergate at a future date?*

A: Well, I don't know, but I cannot be specific when I refer to "we." When I was referring to "we" I was referring to the White House, and my capacity here as White House spokesman. That's what I mean.

Q: *You don't know whether Mr. Nixon will make a statement on Watergate?*

A: I cannot predict anything in this regard because to my knowledge there has been no decision made on this to this point . . .

Q: *Getting back to the President's mood, in one of your earlier answers, when you pointed out that the President has been involved in two summit meetings and was depending on others for information on this Watergate business, that implied that he does feel betrayed. Is that a correct implication?*

A: Gene, I don't think I said that. I think everything I have said up to this point should suggest to you that I'm not going to respond to your question.

Q: *Do you have an idea in terms of time as to when the fuller statement on the Watergate affair will be made here by you or the President or somebody? Weeks or days or hours or just a rough idea?*

A: I understand your question, but let me just point out to you when I made that comment earlier in reference to this question, when I said "we" would be able to be more responsive to questions in the future I'm simply saying that I can't possibly conceive that I would be standing here for an extended period of time maintaining this position, particularly following the April 17th statement that the President made saying that he intends to get to the bottom of this. That was the context in which my remarks should be placed. I don't want to suggest to you today, because I don't know, and there has been no decision as far as I know, for the President to issue a statement at some particular time or not.

So therefore by my comments I don't mean to lead you to draw that conclusion at this point, because I have no basis on which to provide you information to draw that conclusion, but I, of course, am not simply ruling that out. I simply want to bring you into the context of my initial . . .

Q: *Can you conceive of the President not making a statement on Watergate at some later date?*

A: Well, that's not something I want to predict or address myself to.

Q: *In the April 17th statement the President said if anybody was indicted they would be dismissed. And if he's convicted, he will be discharged. Does that imply that the President will have no action regarding members of the White House staff until the grand jury indictments are handed down?*

A: Dick, I really cannot respond to that question because I have no basis to respond to it. In terms of information that I have or anything that I . . . Well, I just can't go beyond the 17th statement. I have no basis to do so.

Q: *Was the customary senior staff meeting held this morning around 7:45 or 8 o'clock?*

A: No. And I should tell you that that has been the case now for—I think several weeks now. But it relates only to the fact that those of us who attended the meeting which took place at 8:15 decided that we could be more productive in the use of that time by meeting with individual members of our staff and other department heads in separate meetings. And I give you that background in terms of the decision because the fact that the so-called as you said senior staff meeting did not take place this morning is not an extraordinary event.

Q: *Has it still been the practice for Mr. Haldeman to be one of the first to see the President in the morning around 9 o'clock, and did he do so this morning?*

A: I think Bob was in to see him this morning, but I don't know the specific time he went in.

Q: *Can you tell me if the President feels that the leaks of grand jury minutes emanated from the prosecution, and, if he does, does he trust the prosecution to conduct the grand jury investigation?*

A: Well, that's something I won't even come close to responding to.

Q: *There was a report that he felt that the prosecution was the source of the leaks from the grand jury.*

A: Well, that's something that I couldn't respond to. I have no basis to respond to it.

Q: *Has the President discussed this matter with Vice President Agnew?*

A: I don't know if he has or not.

Q: *Will you ask sometime when you're in there?*

A: I can, yes sir.

Q: *The Washington Star-News has a report today that says that the President's brother Edward Nixon received a number of phone calls from the headquarters of Mr. Vesco. They say the phone calls were made from the headquarters to the private phone of Edward Nixon. Do you have any knowledge of Edward Nixon's being involved in any affairs relating to Mr. Vesco? Can you comment on that report?*

A: Well, I can't. I have not seen the report. I can't comment on the report, and a report such as that would fall into the basic category which I—basic position that I've had to take.

Q: *Ron, was Secretary Rogers over here yesterday, and has he been asked to*

clean up the White House and the Justice Department?

A: Well, he does not have an office here. He was not over here yesterday. But as I said to the pool last night on Air Force One, the Secretary—I've heard no discussion relating to new responsibilities or temporary responsibilities for Secretary Rogers. The President has talked to Secretary Rogers, as we have said.

Q: *To get back to this question of the telegrams relating to the President's decision last May: To your knowledge has this ever been done before? In other words, on any occasion when the President has made a major announcement or decision and telegrams and communications have come in, have you any reason to believe or any knowledge that any of these were ever sponsored by some group allied to the President or subject to the President?*

A: There's no way for me to answer that question. I don't know.

Q: *Ron, does the President's personal involvement in this investigation include using his influence to persuade those who know what happened to talk?*

A: At this point I simply can't be more responsive in terms of the specifics of the President's efforts.

Q: *Ron, is John Dean at his desk today and if so is he engaged in what you might call productive work?*

A: John, I don't know if he's at his desk today or not. I have not talked to John this morning.

Q: *Ron, did the President see Mr. Wilson this morning?*

A: The President saw Mr. Wilson. Jerry confirmed that. As to whether or not he saw him today I would have to check that.

Q: *When was the last time the President talked to John Connally?*

A: I don't know.

Q: *This weekend?*

A: I don't believe so, Sarah, no.

Q: *Ron, is Henry Petersen being considered for the post of FBI director?*

A: There's a lot of speculation on a lot of different names for the post of director of the FBI. I don't have any knowledge of any specific individual who you could say is being considered for that position. The President has not made a decision on that.

Q: *Ron, can you confirm the reportedly angry response of the President to the Attorney General at that Cabinet meeting over leaking the stuff to the grand jury?*

A: The angry response?

Q: *Yes. That the President responded angrily when Kleindienst said that the leaks came from members of the grand jury The response, according to the report, was, "You know as well as I that they don't have the transcripts.". Is that correct?*

A: Bob, it's unfortunate, but I left the Cabinet meeting before that exchange. And that is a fact. So I can't—those who I talked to who were in that portion of the meeting did not suggest that there was an angry response. But that's all I really know about it.

Q: *Ron, can you clarify something? Can you say that there has been a meeting with Attorney Wilson since last Thursday?*

A: Forrest Boyd asked whether or not Mr. Nixon met with Attorney Wilson today, and I said I'd have to check that.

Q: *To go back to this question of the morning staff meetings, you told us those staff meetings have not been held for several weeks. I'd like to ask you if you'd be a little more specific about that. When did you stop holding such meetings? And you said it was because you felt* [it] *more profitable for members to meet with their own staffs.*

Is it not correct that this has never been the case in the first term, the first four years of the Nixon administration?

A: Well, we have adjusted our staff meetings and our process of staff meetings from time to time as the years have passed, but I've been as specific as I can be, in my answer to the earlier question.

Q: *When was this decision to stop holding the morning meetings?*

A: As I recall it was two or three weeks ago. That's the best that I can recall. It was in the period when we decided that we—

Q: *Which would seem to coincide as about March 21st?*

"I have just discovered major new developments in the Watergate case."

By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

A: Well, the point I'm making is that that's not—it does not—that was not the way it is.

Q: *Ron, the general picture you painted here this morning—*

Q: *If I might finish please, it is then the case here that in that respect Mr. Haldeman is no longer functioning as the person who informally presided at these staff meetings.*

A: No, that is absolutely the wrong conclusion to draw. The conclusion to draw on this matter is the conclusion which you should draw from the statement which I made in relation to why the senior staff meeting has not taken place for a period of time.

We meet frequently through the day, we talk on the telephone and when I said we did decide to change the pattern of the meetings I did not mean—I did not say to meet with our own staff, but for each of us to meet with different department heads or different individuals as the issues come up and as the issues are developed. But this is absolutely no—there's no reason behind this other than that.

Q: *Ron, the general picture you've painted here this morning is one of the staff after this — everyone's status remains the same, I believe you said. That Mr. Haldeman is operating as he was before and Mr. Ehrlichman is, Mr. Dean and others.*

Given your own record—again to put it as generously as possible—of misleading statements in the past on the Watergate issue, what assurances do we have now that the information that you're getting now on the Watergate matter is any better than what it was before? What steps have you taken to insure that your information that you're giving us and that we give to the people on the outside is any better now than it was before?

A: I'm not attempting to paint a picture here this morning. I'm attempting to respond to questions in the limited way in which I already have indicated to you that I could respond to that.

I answered your questions in relation to the White House staff. Saying that there is no change in the status of the White House staff. I will stand on that issue, that answer. I will not dissect it for you. I'm not prepared to do that, but I will stand on the answer.

Q: *I'm not asking you to dissect it, but deal with the major thrust of the question.*

A: I understand that. Now, in terms of the major thrust of the question, I'm proceeding as I have in the past to provide a reflection of the White House as the White House spokesman to the best of—in the best way that I can.

Q: *Ron, do you expect to continue in this job? As press secretary?*

A: I expect to, yes sir.