

Transcript of 'Practics Session' News

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WASHINGTON, June 26—Following is a transcript of a news briefing "practice session," for Ronald L. Ziegler, the Presidential press secretary, with members of the White House staff, which was referred to yesterday by John W. Dean d before the Senate Watergate committee. The transcript was provided by Mr. Dean to the committee, which released it today. No date on the practice session was provided, but the transcript indicates it was in mid-October, 1972.

ZIEGLER: Dwight Chapin already made it clear that the story was fundamentally inaccurate and one based on hearsay. Now there have been a number of stories which have appeared over the last few days—and over the last few months—that you gentlemen have asked me about. All of these stories have been based on hearsay or on sources which have not been identified. These stories have resulted in substantial confusion. All of them seem to be lumped together as the Watergate affair. The Watergate affair is one that has been thoroughly investigated and seven men have been indicted. It has been one of the most extensive investigations in history.

The other stories that have run relate to the Watergate where criminal action is involved. But still we see such stories as espionage, sabotage, spying, surveillance — all being charged to activities of the re-election campaign. But none of the charges are based upon anything more than hearsay or unidentified sources.

Now I can tell you I have nothing more to say or add on this subject beyond what Dwight Chapin said in his statement — but I will tell you this. At no time has anyone in the White House or this Administration condoned such activities as spying on individuals, or sabotaging campaigns in an illegal way. The President has said before and I will repeat it again. He does not condone this type of activity.

Now three weeks bofer the election there is a flurry of senstaionalism. I am not going to inject the White House into these stories. I am not going to assume th responsibility from this podium and from the White House press room t answer every unfounded story based on hearsay or unidentified sources. . . . Every story based on some sensational charge durthis period. . . .

EHRlichman: We are going to see all kinds of Presidential friends, Presidential staff, Presidential relatives, dogs, etc., pictures on the front pages of local newspapers to counteract the fact that McGovern is 2 to 1 behind. I am not going to try to cope with these unfounded stories.

Chapin: I am not going to dignify desperation politics.

QUESTION: Ron, that was a self-righteous, self-serving statement. Simply, is the answer yes or no? Did Dwight Chapin, the President's appointments secretary — man who meets with the President regularly — hire Segretti and instruct him to engage in sabotage?

ZIEGLER: Gentlemen, I have nothing to add to what Mr. Chapin has already said on this and that is that the story is fundamentally inaccurate and based on hearsay.

Question on Segretti

QUESTION: But Ron, why don't you just ask Dwight or why doesn't the President just ask him. Did or he not hire Segretti?

ZIEGLER: Gentlemen, I have nothing to add to what Chapin has already said on the subject.

QUESTION: Are you telling us that you won't say whether or not the President condones activities such as sabotage, espionage, surveillance?

ZIEGLER: If you would listen to what I said, you note that I stated that the dones this type of activity and no one in the White House under any circumstances directed, encouraged, or suggested that people at any level in the campaign in-

Conference



United Press International

Ronald L. Ziegler, former White House press secretary. During yesterday's testimony, Mr. Dean said he was instructed not to brief Mr. Ziegler on the Watergate affair.

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volve themselves in surveillance of individual, spying on individuals, stealing documents or any illegal or repulsive steps such as have been charged in the source sensational stories that have been published.

QUESTION: Is it true Segretti was a close, personal friend of Chapin's?

ZIEGLER: Mr. Chapin covered that in the statement.

QUESTION: When was the last time that Chapin saw Segretti?

ANSWER: I don't know.

QUESTION: Why don't you ask him?

ANSWER: Gentlemen, I told you I had nothing to add.

'Campaign Pranks'

EHRlichman: We just don't take as seriously as you do these campaign pranks. Some of you for your own purposes have blown these into something that is not there.

ZIEGLER: I don't think we can take on the press.

EHRlichman: Dwight Chapin is terribly offended at the treatment he got over the weekend. I approached him to the possibility of coming out here. He said he would never again speak to any member of the press and he would like your apologies.

MOORE: This refers to a statement of policy and it is clear that it is the right one. What is the right of anyone to expect an answer from this podium on a story which is based on sources you will not reveal? Good citizens are being vilified base on irresponsible, unidentified stories and stories which draw broad-sweeping conclusions. You have this right under the First Amendment—make charges on hearsay evidence.

Today you had a four-column picture in which Dwight Chapin was named as a contact in sabotage. The person who said it was not named. To take this admittedly, unsupported, non-knowledge and assert it as knowledge to the point where—you may do so, but it does not give you a right to expect an answer from the President's press secretary or from the President of the United States. When and if anyone comes in here with evidence of wrongdoing you will receive an answer. Until that occurs, we will go on to the next questions or next subject. Jim Mitchell—Fund. He denied it. Bill Timmons—he denied it.

No Sources

Clawson and the letter—he denied it. In none of these cases was the source for the story revealed, but these men for the rest of their lives will have to live with these charges for which they have no recourse.

QUESTION: If you feel so strongly about this, then why don't you just deny it?

These are the rules. Mr. Chapin has asked me to make a voluntary statement. As a man who has worked in campaigns for X number of years and have seen many pranks and hoaxes, it occurred to me we should have our own Dick Tuck in this campaign. Gordon Strachan recalled that our old friend, Don Segretti, was coming out of the Army in September. We called him and he expressed interest in the assignment of being a counter-agent. On that basis I said to him that perhaps I could get an okay for you to be supported and take off on your own on activities as long as they are legal.

I referred him to Mr. Kalmbach, who did supply funds which would allow him to act on his own for a few

months. I did this on my own without any knowledge or encouragement or authority.

I have read nothing to the contrary that Segretti has done anything illegal or inconsistent with traditional stories in politics — and the most I heard was a postcard or clipping from the newspaper.

I have noted that nothing has been said that anything was illegal or of any consequence.

Then you might read a statement from the President of the United States. . . . Dwight Chapin is one of the most able and most respected men on my staff. In my opinion, he made a mistake in encouraging pranks. However, this has occurred in my campaigns in the past and had no effect there. I am sure these pranks have had no effects here.

EHRlichman: Two exceptions — the Government and the White House. Chapin is the White House and the separation—you bridge the separation when you get the President in it.

ZIEGLER: Who paid him and how was he paid?

MOORE: On Mr. Chapin's recommendation that he was going to further the cause of the campaign, Mr. Kalmbach paid him.

DEAN: If we are doing something about them, there are a host of charges here and we are looking into them and we are going to have a response for you.

Looking Into It

MOORE: We make investigations and we check the evidence.

DEAN: It is being looked into — we are looking into

it. We don't have the answers.

MOORE: Does the President have any reaction?

Yes, he is absolutely revolted and distressed that the word sabotage is connected by picture and name of a man whom he considers — based on an unsubstantiated story.

RESPONSE A:

Let's get to the question of precisely what the allegation is. With regard to the Watergate, it was quite evidently a crime—a serious crime—with regard to the other allegations they range from allegations of political high-jinks, pranks and hoaxes, all the way to more serious matters such as spying and surveillance on individuals. The President is under no obligation to comment upon these charges for the reason (a) they are unsubstantiated; (b) they are unsupported, and (c) in our judgment, both the timing, character, and the placement of these stories is political in character. The purpose is to focus attention from the central issues of the campaign. The President is under no obligation nor should he get into discussion or comment on these tactics.

RESPONSE B:

I have already made my comment that (a) Dwight Chapin did direct the hiring of Segretti, that (b) once Segretti was hired, the day to day activities were not Chapin's responsibility.

RESPONSE C:

The President does not comment on allegations of campaign tactics, i.e., militants at the rally in California.