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The Reaction to Nixon's Taping

Washington

Public figures ranging from George Meany to George Romney reacted with incredulity yesterday to testimony that President Nixon had tape-recorded conversations and telephone calls without consent.

Current Nixon Administration Cabinet members, while refraining from direct criticism of the President, said to a man that they didn't know their conversations were being recorded.

"No kidding," said former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst in a voice filled with astonishment.

"I'm literally astonished, I'm incredulous," said Robert H. Finch, longtime Nixon confidante and a former White House counselor and Health Education and Welfare secretary. "I remember being told by several source that Lydon Johnson had an arrangement like that but it had been discontinued. I assumed that was the case."

'SICK'

Former Interior Secretary Walter J. Hiekel, who was dismissed by the President after publicly protesting the administration's Vietnam policies, said that "America will be sick at heart" over the disclosures.

Another ex-Cabinet member, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Romney, said that "from a historical standpoint" he was pleased that his views were recorded but had never suspected that this was the case.

"I had some things to say I thought needed saying," said Romney. "They weren't always listened to, but I'm glad they were recorded. I hope they don't get edited."

MEANY

AFL-CIO president Meany, a White House guest on several occasions, said he did not have "the slightest

idea" that any of his conversations were recorded. Referring to the testimony of former Nixon aide Alexander P. Butterfield, Meany said:

"If this man were not testifying under oath, I would not believe it, because it is so fantastic as to be almost beyond belief. God bless the blunderers at Watergate. If they hadn't been so clumsy, America would never have known about things like this."

Democratic leaders in the Congress were critical of the recordings, although most said they would not have objected if they had been told in advance.

"I'm not surprised but I don't like it," said Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield. "I wouldn't have minded if they told me."

GOLDWATER

The congressman who seemed least surprised of all was Senator Barry Goldwater (Rep-Ariz.), who said through a spokesman that he regarded recording conversations for historical purposes as appropriate but believes that people who are being recorded should be notified in advance.

The spokesman said Goldwater was not surprised "for a very strange reason . . . one conversation he had in the Oval Office was reported so precisely by Jack Anderson that he felt there

had to be a recording device in operation at the time; there was not a comma out of place."

Goldwater told the President this at the time, the spokesman said, adding that the source of the story must be a very well-placed leak.

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