

At This Point in Time

By Tom Wicker

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, at this point in time, just before I deactivate my testimony, I would make a statement in the nature of a negative on this type of idea you can read in the press that says, well, those are just a lot of lies they have been telling down there in Washington.

Mr. Chairman, I would state accurately to this committee that it is pretty far from a lot of lies that we have been telling down here in Washington, although I would have to guess you won't read that type of statement in the press tomorrow. But I would say we could move this thing along if I would help you understand the total setting in which these types of statements that some in the press, some individuals in the press, and I'm not complaining about it just stating a fact, have made where they say, well, it just doesn't add up.

Now I obviously without a great deal of study and without a great deal more expertise than I have, I would not feel competent or that it was appropriate for me to comment on each and every one of these hundreds of types of things that some of these individuals in the press would have you believe are not exactly, well, one hundred per cent. But I would say I would have some knowledge about some of these statements that have been mentioned in the press, and it would be impropriety squared if as best I could I didn't share this type of thing with this committee, particularly after the lengthy process of review that I have put myself through, as well as all my files that didn't go to the shredder.

So to go directly to one point raised by some of these individuals in the press that we were off to one side of the mark, so to speak, when we said that these types of stories in the press that said, well, the White House is up to their ears in Watergate, were based on hearsay and innuendo and character assassination.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I would say, and I believe the record would bear me out here, that we were not off to one side of the mark. We were very careful about that and we would be remiss if we were not. Because what we were saying was, look, these types of stories are based on hearsay and innuendo and character assassination, and Mr. Chairman, if you look at the text of those types of stories that is exactly what they were based on, right down the line. Just the hearsay and innuendo of some individuals that maybe had their own motivations. I'm not saying they had those types of motivations but they could have had, and we had the responsibility in the total setting and the over-all context to look at that so they would not have our head in their lap.

IN THE NATION

So they were just based on hearsay and innuendo and they certainly, I would say, did assassinate some characters around the White House, and so how can they say, well, the White House is putting out word that is not viable? Because we never said those types of stories were wrong, just that they were based on hearsay, innuendo and character assassination, and incidentally that type of a game plan gave us the option to point out how badly we need a responsible press in this land of ours.

Now I would say that on balance and again, if you will, in the total setting of the executive branch and the separation of powers, together with the national security which no man ever can for one moment forget when you're sitting in the Oval Office with those tapes going every minute of the night and day—Mr. Chairman, I would have to say that these types of statements that maybe we would not have placed exactly the highest priority on truth when we said that the beach cabana at San Clemente was built to provide Presidential security, that is just one of these things these individuals in the press say from time to time, and it is not going to wash.

Now the ongoing process of security requires that we sit down and ask ourselves, well, what is it that might actually in point of fact threaten the Presidency? Not just the President, because we have to reserve all our options when it comes to the Presidency itself, and I'm sure you'll agree on that. And in the process of exploring all those options, what became perfectly obvious was that if some individuals in the public could look across the beach and see the President of the United States in the process of putting on his pants one leg at a time like any other type of individual, well, it would just not be certain in that type of a case that the option of the Presidency itself could survive.

Now in another time framework altogether, these same individuals in the press would have other individuals believe there was maybe something inoperable about our statements that we were not protectively reacting in Cambodia. In point of fact what we really said was that we respected their neutrality as an on-going process on our part, and the fact is Mr. Chairman, that we kept right on respecting their neutrality for the whole time we were optioning to take them off the board. And we still respect it, and we are just totally nonplussed that any individual would think any other type of thing about that.