

The Watergate Tapes: What, When, and Their Importance

Following is an index to the nine Watergate tapes, an abbreviated summary of what is believed to be their contents, and the reasons why the special prosecutor's office wants them.

June 20, 1972—Three days after the Watergate break-in, President Nixon met with White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and domestic affairs adviser John D. Ehrlichman, shortly after the two aides had met with former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, White House Counsel John W. Dean III and Attorney General Richard G. Kleindeinst. According to former Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, "The inference that they reported on Watergate and may well have received instructions is almost irresistible."

Since the President has consistently maintained that he first learned of the alleged cover-up on March 21, 1973, the prosecutors would like to know what was said at the meeting a year earlier. This is the tape with the 18-minute "gap" in which there is no audible conversation.

June 20, 1972—A four-minute telephone conversation

between Mr. Nixon and Mitchell. Mitchell said he volunteered no details about Watergate to the President, but Cox told the court that the tape could reveal a "more candid report."

The White House revealed last Oct. 31 this tape does not exist because the telephone the President used was not connected to a recorder.

June 30, 1972—The day before Michell resigned from the Nixon re-election committee for "personal" reasons, he and Haldeman met with the President for more than an hour. Cox said it "strains credulity" to suppose that Watergate was not discussed at that meeting.

Sept. 15, 1972—The day the original seven Watergate defendants were indicted, Mr. Nixon met with Dean and Haldeman and, according to Dean, the President commended his counsel for doing a "good job" in keeping the investigation in bounds. The prosecutors would like to know if that conversation involved a conspiracy to obstruct justice, or if Dean committed perjury in giving his account of what was said.

March 13, 1973—A 75-min-

ute meeting between the President and Dean in which "silence money" and executive clemency were discussed, according to Dean's testimony. The prosecutors would like to know whether the President, as Dean claims, said that raising \$1 million to buy the Watergate defendants' silence was "no problem."

March 21, 1973—Dean, according to his own testimony, told the President in Haldeman's presence that there was a "cancer growing on the presidency" and that massive perjury had been committed by White House staff members. The prosecutors would like to know the President's reaction.

March 21, 1973—Again, the sole topic of conversation was Watergate, and Dean has testified that it was clear to him that the alleged cover-up would continue. The tape is essential, according to the prosecutors, in determining whether there was a cover-up, and, if there was, who participated in it.

March 22, 1973—A meeting among Mr. Nixon, Dean, Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman in which, ac-

ording to testimony by the four presidential advisers, there was a discussion of the potential problems of the Senate committee inquiry. The tape, according to Cox, "is likely to reveal the knowledge and motives of the participants."

April 15, 1973—The controversial meeting between the President and Dean, in which Mr. Nixon said he had been "joking" on March 13 when he made the remark about \$1 million payoffs to the defendants.

Dean testified that he had suspected that the conversation had been taped, and that it appeared that the President asked "leading" questions to establish a record.

"If true and accurate, this [Dean] testimony would indicate an important dimension to the cover-up conspiracy," Cox said. "If false and misleading, a perjurious injustice has been done for which the grand jury can return an indictment."

The White House said this conversation never was taped because of malfunctioning equipment. Although the President previously had told the Justice Department that he had a Dictabelt recording of his own recollections of the meeting, the White House on Nov. 12 said it cannot find the Dictabelt.