

NYTimes
White House Refuses Comment Now

JAN 16 1974 JAN 16 1974

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15—The White House refused today to make a "premature comment" on the technical experts' findings on the erased Watergate tape but asserted that conclusions should not be drawn while the matter was still before the court.

However, Eliot L. Richardson, the former Attorney General, and Senators of both parties said today's disclosures would be damaging to President Nixon.

The following statement was issued by the office of the White House counsel, James D. St. Clair:

"The summary of the report of the advisory panel on the White House tapes, which has gone to Judge [John J.] Sirica, has been received and is under review.

"Since this received report is only a summary, and since the matter is still within the jurisdiction of the District Court, any premature comment would only contribute further to existing public confusion surrounding the tapes.

"However, while the White House will withhold immediate comment, it would be alto-

gether incorrect and improper for premature judgments or conclusions to be reached in the absence of any judicial decision and while the process is still under way."

In Los Angeles, Mr. Richardson expressed "dismay and concern" at the disclosure that there had been repeated erasures on the tape of a conversation about the Watergate affair between President Nixon and his former chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman.

"I think that the President and his Administration have already faced and do face a serious problem of credibility and public confidence, and these findings certainly will not help," Mr. Richardson said.

Speaking to a civic association, he said that he thought the findings would add to the pressures for impeachment of the President.

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., LCHAIRMAN OF THE Watergate investigation committee, was in Acapulco, Mexico, and could not be reached today, but members of his committee asserted that the experts' report was sure to increase Mr. Nixon's credibility problem.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr.,

the ranking Republican on the committee, said in Memphis that the latest disclosure was "potentially damaging" to Mr. Nixon and was "another in an unfortunate, bizarre set of circumstances."

Another Republican on the committee Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut, said that it was "a tragedy that anything is being handled in such a way as to impair the integrity of the tapes" and added, "That's what happened, apparently."

Senator Joseph M. Montoya of New Mexico, a Democrat on the Watergate panel, said that the report "clearly confirms the already prevalent opinion of the nation as to the credibility of the President."

In Olympia, Wash., Senator Henry M. Jackson, a potential Democratic Presidential candidate, said, "This creates the most serious problem to date. The burden has shifted to the President and his White House aides to explain what went on."

John Doar, chief counsel for the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry, refused to comment on today's findings, as did the former Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox.