

'We've Got to Head Them Off'

Washington

Here is a segment of an edited transcript of a White House meeting between President Nixon and Deputy Attorney General Henry Petersen late April 27, 1973. Mr. Nixon is designated as P and Petersen as HP:

P. I was down in Mississippi today. We have gotten a report that, ah, that really we've got to head them off at the pass. Because it's so damned — so damn dangerous to the presidency, in a sense. There's a reporter by the name of Seymour Hersh of the New York Times you probably know.

HP. He's the fellow that did the Vietnam stories.

P. Right. Who told William Bittman, (E. Howard Hunt's lawyer) . . . apparently that they have information — Hersh has information . . . You can't ever tell who is saying "this is from Hersh" or "this is from Bittman." Information indicating that John Dean has made statements to the prosecuting team implicating the President. And whether — and whether — the Post has heard similar rumors. Now, Henry, this I've got to know. Now, understand — I have

told you everything I know about this thing.

HP. I don't have any problem with that, Mr. President, and I'll get in touch with them immediately, but —

P. Who?

HP. With U.S. Attorneys Harold Titus, Earl Silbert and Seymour Glanzer and Donald Campbell? Who are —

P. Do you mind calling them right now?

HP. No, sir.

P. OK. Say, "Now, look. All of your conversations with Dean and Bittman, do they implicate the President?" Because we can't—I've got—if the U.S. attorney's office and, ah . . .

HP. Mr. President (unintelligible) I had them over there — we had a kind of crisis of confidence night before last. I left to come over here and I left my two principal assistants to discourse with Silbert and the other three. And in effect it concerned me — whether or not they were at ease with my reporting to you, and I pointed out to them that I had very specific instructions, discussed that with them before on that subject,

and — well . . .

HP. As a consequence — I kind of laid in to Titus yesterday and it cleared the air a little bit, but there is a very suspicious atmosphere. They are concerned and scared. Ah — and I will check on this but I have absolutely no information at this point that —

HP. Mr. President, I tell you, I do not consider it, you know, I've said to Titus, "We have to draw the line. We have no mandate to investigate the President. We investigate Watergate." And I don't know where that line draws, but we have to draw that all the time.

P. Good. Because if Dean is implicating the presidency — we are going to damned well find out about it. That's — that's — because let me tell you the only conversations we ever had with him, was that famous March 21 conversation I told you about, where he told me about Bittman coming to him. No, the Bittman request for \$120,000 for E. Howard Hunt. And I then finally began to get at them. I explored with him thoroughly, "Now what the hell is this for?" He said, "It's because he's blackmailing



SEYMOUR HERSH
N.Y. Times reporter

(John) Ehrlichman." Remember I said that's what it's about. And Hunt is going to recall the seamy side of it. And I asked him, "Well, how would you get it? How would you get it to them?"

"Etc. But my purpose was to find out what the hell had been going on before. And believe me, nothing was approved. I mean as far as I'm concerned — as far as I'm concerned turned it off totally.

HP. Yeah. My understanding of law is — my understanding of our responsibilities, is that if it came to that I would have to come to you and say, "We can't do that." The only people who have jurisdiction to do that is the House of Representatives, as far as I'm concerned.

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