

The Transcripts Seem To Strengthen Drive To Impeach President

Damage Seems to Outweigh Benefits to Nixon; Few In GOP Rush to His Aid

A Pitch to Public in Phoenix

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WASHINGTON—President Nixon's massive Watergate disclosures now threaten to boomerang—and become the catalyst for even more intense efforts to oust him from office.

The edited transcripts of his conversations with key aides disclose reams of extremely damaging information that Nixon critics can cite as evidence that the President participated in the Watergate cover-up over a lengthy period.

In contrast, there are relatively few Nixon remarks tending to support the Presi-

The tape transcripts provide a detailed look at the legal strategies pondered by Mr. Nixon and his aides in the wake of the Watergate break-in; that story is on page 2. Excerpts from the transcript of the crucial March 21, 1973, meeting in the Oval Office appear on page 12, along with editorial comment.

dent's contention that the transcripts, taken as a whole, show he was trying to unravel the Watergate case rather than suppress as much as possible.

Significantly, perhaps, few congressional Republicans rushed to embrace the new White House line that the transcripts will finally exonerate the President. And, ominously for Mr. Nixon, some previously cautious Democrats declared that impeachment prospects in the House are heightened by the detailed record of the President's conduct.

"Close to Obstruction"

Thus, Democratic Rep. George Danielson of the House Judiciary Committee, speaking out forcefully for the first time, said that key sections of the transcripts suggest that the President "violated his oath of office to take care that the laws are faithfully executed" and came "awfully close to obstruction of justice."

In particular, after "staying up half the night" reading transcripts, Rep. Danielson cited portions of a March 21, 1973, presidential conversation that, to him, indicate that Mr. Nixon was aware of perjury by his underlings, explored how to restrict grand jury testimony and apparently authorized payment of hush money to a low-level defendant in the Watergate break-in trial. "Unless this is neutralized by other strong evidence, it's very strong grounds to be considered as impeachable offenses," Mr. Danielson asserted.

Mr. Danielson's assessment is shared by many others who have spent hours poring over the 1,308 pages of transcripts since their release Tuesday afternoon. Rep. James Mann of South Carolina, a conservative Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, said some of his House colleagues—both Democrat and Republican—who had previously been skeptical about the grounds for impeachment are now saying that the transcripts "seem to indicate there's more substance to the matter than they thought."

Speaking of Mr. Nixon's release of the transcripts, Rep. Richard Bolling, a veteran, influential Democrat from Missouri, said "my impression is it hurts him." Mr. Bolling said that prior to Monday night's TV address he detected a growing feeling in the House that the President would be impeached. The events of the past two days "tend to firm that up," he said.

It must be stressed, however, that many members of Congress haven't yet plowed through the new evidence, and consequently most of them are remaining noncommittal for the time being. And some, like Ohio Republican Rep. Delbert Latta of the Judiciary Committee say they think the President's disclosures will help him "in the public's mind."

But generally noncommittal comments are in themselves a sign that the White House effort to rally support for the President among Republicans and conservative Democrats may not get off the ground. Indeed, Republicans are notably cool to the White House line that the public reaction to the President's disclosures is strongly favorable. "It should have been done a year ago," says GOP Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee. "It would have been more helpful to him."

Antagonizing Allies?

Others say that, at best, the President has achieved a brief holding position, well short of the White House hope for a decisive turn in the President's favor. Moreover, there is strong congressional dissatisfaction with the White House position, as expressed by Nixon counsel James St. Clair, that requests or subpoenas for further evidence will be refused.

This strategy threatens to undermine the image of full disclosure the President is seeking to convey and, more substantively, to antagonize Republicans whom Mr. Nixon is relying on in the impeachment battle. Thus, one of the most conservative Judiciary Committee members, Rep. Trent Lott of Mississippi, says: "I'm not willing to draw the line now and say this is all we can have."

The Judiciary Committee already has requested (but not yet subpoenaed) further tapes and documents concerning the Watergate cover-up, and also the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. and dairy industry cases involving allegations of favors in return for Nixon campaign contributions. "A week or two from now," predicts liberal Democratic Rep. Morris Udall of Arizona, "the talk is going to be why don't you give us at least transcripts on milk, ITT, the
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plumbers, etc. What can Nixon answer to that?"

Moreover, special Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski has subpoenaed further documents relating to indictments in the cover-up case. But Mr. St. Clair went into court yesterday seeking to quash the prosecutor's subpoena, and he renewed all the President's claims for executive privilege that have so rankled Congress. It is solely up to the President, Mr. St. Clair declared, "to decide when the public interest requires that he exercise his constitutional privilege to refuse to produce information."

For his part, prosecutor Jaworski seems confident that the courts ultimately will order Mr. Nixon to comply with the current subpoena, as they did in an earlier case, and that the President will again be forced to back down.

A Gloomy View

The just-beginning struggle over further Watergate evidence does seem likely to result in the delay that the White House clearly appears to want in the proceedings, despite repeated presidential protestations that he wants Watergate over with. There is divided opinion whether, in fact, delay may ultimately make impeachment in the House less likely; up to the transcript disclosures, delaying tactics by Mr. Nixon were actually encouraging impeachment sentiment.

Whatever the effect, many Congressmen now think the Judiciary Committee is faced with such procedural problems that there is "no way," as one lawmaker puts it, for it to meet its June 30 target for a decision. Indeed, some agree with the gloomy view expressed by California GOP Rep. Barry Goldwater Jr. that an impeachment vote won't occur in the House until "a couple of weeks before the November elections."

Judiciary Committee members spent much of yesterday trying to figure out how to respond to the President's less-than-full compliance with the terms of the panel's subpoena. As an evening meeting started, there appeared to be fairly broad agreement that most members would vote to send the President a letter merely informing him that he isn't in compliance, postponing a showdown on the issue of whether Mr. Nixon should be cited for contempt for releasing only edited transcripts rather than the tapes themselves.

It is clear, though, that the President's limited compliance with the subpoena rankles some committee Republicans as well as Democrats. For instance, conservative GOP Rep. M. Caldwell Butler of Virginia objects to the presidential condition that only the chairman and ranking Republican on the committee could actually listen to the tapes—barring its staff members from taking part. They "are entitled to all the technical assistance they want when they go down to the White House to listen to the tapes," he says.

Yet while the committee is wrangling over such procedural matters, the White House is pulling out all stops to stimulate public support for the President. Thus, at the White House yesterday, reporters and photographers were summoned at noon to the Oval Office to witness Mr. Nixon greeting a group of folks who had gathered signatures of people who support him.

His color good and his manner animated, Mr. Nixon basked as his visitors told him that "the whole country is Nixon country" and, referring to the signatures, "there are the grass roots of your supporters throughout this country." Later, presidential spokesman Gerald Warren announced that the overall tone of messages coming into the White House was "very good."

At Work as Peacemaker

Tomorrow, Mr. Nixon will take to the hustings to personally make his pitch in a

Phoenix, Ariz., appearance, and Saturday will find him still on the stump in Spokane, Wash. Very shortly, too, a flurry of foreign travel will show the President at work in his role as a world peacemaker.

Thus, if Henry Kissinger manages to get a Syrian-Israeli military disengagement during his current Mideast trip, President Nixon almost certainly will go himself to the Mideast in late May or early June. Four nations are sure stops—Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—and the President is guaranteed a hero's welcome in them all if his peace-making efforts in the region are still bearing fruit.

Definitely scheduled is a trip to Russia starting June 20. Mr. Nixon probably will spend a week in talks with Soviet Communist Party chief Leonid Brezhnev in search of new arms control, trade and political understandings. Moreover, many European diplomats anticipate a Nixon visit while en route to or from Moscow. Although Mr. Nixon has no substantive business to conduct, he could chat with the new leaders of Britain and France and stop off in Brussels to restate American support of both NATO and the Common Market.

All this would be an effort to underline Mr. Nixon's ability to continue functioning effectively as President even as Congress squabbles over impeachment.

It is questionable, however, whether any non-Watergate activity by Mr. Nixon will really influence the ultimate impeachment decision by the House and a trial by the Senate, if matters go that far. Much more important will be the mass of evidence now in the hands of Congress—which includes much more than the edited transcripts Mr. Nixon has now made public.

By and large, members of Congress insist convincingly that they will make their final judgments based on their reading of the facts of the matter. If that takes a long time, they think the public will tolerate it.

"The public isn't going to lose attention, and Watergate isn't going to go away," says Rep. Udall of Arizona.