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# What Nixon Knew, and When, and What He Did: A View

By Dean Burch

WASHINGTON—The bottom line in the entire Watergate affair, and by extension in the impeachment inquiry, consists of answers to these questions: What did the President know? When did he know it? And what did he do about it?

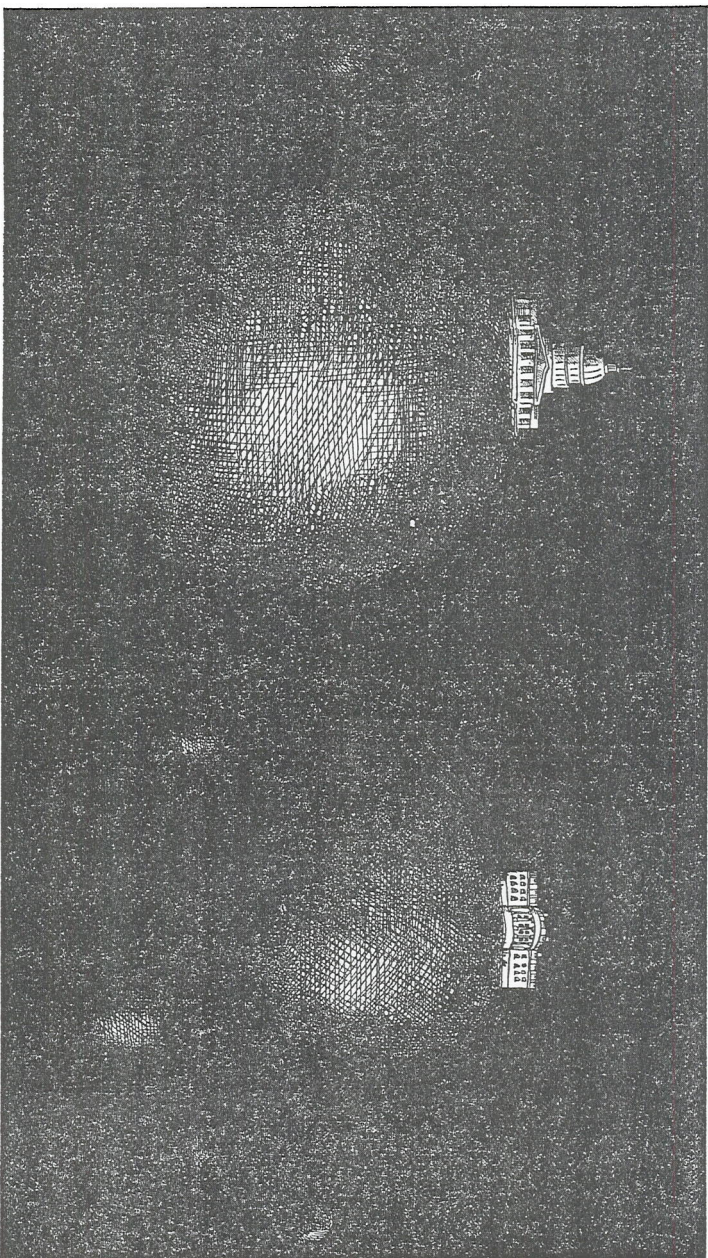
The transcripts provided to the House Judiciary Committee answer these questions, in exhaustive and compelling detail. The committee members now have in hand all the evidence necessary to bring Watergate to a swift conclusion and, equally important, a just conclusion.

It is clear from the transcripts that the President, when finally informed of the Watergate cover-up by John W. Dean 3d in that critical March 21 meeting, moved decisively to bring out the whole story. Mr. Dean's reluctance to lay it all out is understandable: He was involved up to his ears.

In these taped conversations, which clearly at the time were not intended to be used as evidence either of Presidential involvement or noninvolvement, the President said that "everybody in this case is to talk and to tell the truth." Again, he said that "we are going to get to the bottom of this thing." And, again: "Let the chips fall where they may." Still later: "We all have to do the right thing. Damn it! We just cannot have this kind of business...."

Contained in those conversations is a solid thread of evidence of a President who was determined that all the facts be brought out and presented to the proper authorities, so that courts of law must decide the innocence or guilt of those involved.

The initial point is that the President knew for the first time on



March 21—and at no time before—of the Watergate cover-up. It was Mr. Dean's testimony that placed the date as early as the previous Sept. 15, but he himself later retreated to the level of mere "inference" for this allegation. It is now finally put to rest by the actual taped conversation.

The President—now aware of what was happening—turned the March 21 meeting into a cross-examination of Mr. Dean. Altogether, the President asked more than 150 questions of Mr. Dean, probing for the full story.

Mr. Dean outlined the Watergate break-in and the developing testimony before the grand jury. He said to Mr. Nixon: "We have a cancer within, close to the Presidency, that is grow-

ing." At one point, Mr. Dean said: "I know, sir, I can just tell from our conversation that these are things you have no knowledge of."

Even then, Mr. Dean did not tell it all. He did not detail his own involvement in the cover-up.

The tape of March 21 provides answers to the first two questions: What did the President know? When did he know it?

Thereafter, and in rapid-fire succession, the President did the following things:

- He ordered Mr. Dean to go to Camp David and prepare a written report on the matter. This came less than 24 hours after he learned of the cover-up.

- He ordered Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst to report directly to the President on any White House involvement.

- He instructed all White House staff members, including Mr. Dean, to testify before the grand jury, and later he gave the same order with regard to the Senate Watergate Committee, without claims of executive privilege, and without immunity.

- He received offers of resignations from H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, which he later accepted.

- He issued on April 17 a statement saying that he had begun his own investigation and that if any White House staff members, or any one else in Government, were indicted

they would be suspended and that those convicted would be discharged.

- He made a nationwide address accepting the resignations of Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman and announcing that Mr. Dean had also resigned. He also announced the appointment of a new Attorney General, Elliot L. Richardson. Mr. Richardson was given the responsibility for "uncovering the whole truth" about Watergate.

All this occurred in the space of five weeks—weeks in which the President was moving decisively to find out what had happened in the wake of Watergate, to "prick the boil" and "take the heat."

The conclusions are obvious: The President had no prior knowledge of the break-in nor any part in its cover-up. He engaged in no plot to obstruct justice.

He moved swiftly to get to the bottom of the case, to get the facts before the proper authorities—with the final objective of bringing those guilty of wrongdoing before the courts where justice could be meted out.

These were the President's actions. The tape-recorded conversations bear them out in every substantial detail.

The tapes have also raised questions about the propriety and even the morality of the conversations, and these are matters that every American has to judge for himself. But the focus of the Judiciary Committee has not changed. As before, its duty must be to define an impeachable offense and to judge the data against this precise and exacting criterion. The committee now has the evidence it needs to put the long agony of Watergate behind us.

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