

'Risk' of Coverup-- New Transcript

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President Nixon told two of his top aides two weeks after the Watergate break-in that there was a "risk" of further disclosure in the case and suggested that his lieutenants "cut the loss fast," according to a transcript of part of a White House meeting.

The transcript—which is only two pages long and very ambiguous on some points—nonetheless indicates that the President was aware of some kind of concealment concerning Watergate, though not necessarily an illegal coverup.

Members of the House Judiciary Committee, which is considering Mr. Nixon's possible impeachment, received copies Wednesday of the brief transcript—which covers

part of a meeting on June 30, 1972, that was attended by the President, former White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman and

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former Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

A copy of the transcript, in which the three men discuss the resignation of Mitchell as the President's campaign manager, was obtained by the Washington Post.

The day after that meeting, on July 1, 1972, Mitchell's resignation was announced, amid strong deni-

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als by the White House and the former attorney general that the resignation had anything to do with the Watergate case.

The White House argued unsuccessfully in court papers last year that the tape

of the June 30, 1972, meeting should not be turned over to the Watergate special prosecutor on grounds that the discussion contained only "a few passing and collateral references to Watergate which are not substantive."

The transcript opens with Haldeman apparently warning of the risks of postponing Mitchell's resignation.

"Well, there is another facet," Haldeman stated. "The longer you wait the more risk each hour brings. You run the risk of more stuff, valid or invalid, surfacing on the Watergate caper-type of thing."

Responding, the President's first comment was: "Yes, that's the other thing. If something does come out, but we won't — we hope nothing will. It may not. But there is always the risk."

Haldeman continued: "As of now there is no problem there. As, as of any moment in the future there is at least a potential problem."

"Well, I'd cut the loss fast," the President responded. "I'd cut it fast. If we're going to do it I'd cut it fast. That's my view, generally speaking . . ."

A source close to the House Judiciary Committee said yesterday that the June 30, 1972 transcript was included in the presentation of evidence to committee members "because it shows part of a pattern to keep the lid on . . . and the President is in on it early."

Another involved in the committee's investigation said that the transcript's meaning is not completely clear. "It deals with one of the biggest problems," he said — the necessity to determine if there was any difference between a political coverup to avoid embarrassment and a criminal coverup.

At the time of the meeting on June 30, 1972, and for

months afterwards, it was the stated position of the White House, Mr. Nixon and the Committee for the Re-Election of the President that the Watergate break-in was in no way authorized by White House or high campaign officials — and that they had no knowledge of the burglars' activities.

In arguing that the June 30 tape recording should not be turned over to the Watergate prosecution force, the President's lawyers had contended that there was nothing in the tape "concerning possible criminal conduct or discussions of possible conduct."

However, U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica ruled last December 19 that about

five minutes of conversation on the tape of a 75-minute meeting were relevant to the grand jury's investigation and ordered that portion of the recording turned over to the special prosecutor's office.

It is believed that the five-minute segment of the tape was later turned over to the Judiciary Committee.

The part of the transcript prepared by the Judiciary Committee shows the President, Haldeman and Mitchell discussing how to best handle the public announcement of Mitchell's impending resignation as campaign manager.

In an apparent reference to Mitchell's later public statement that he resigned "to devote more time to my wife and family," the President stated that such a presentation in "human terms" would be advantageous, according to the transcript.

"I think the story is you're positive rather than negative," Mr. Nixon continued, "Because as I said as I was preparing to answer for this press conference, I just wrote it out, as I usually do, one way — terribly sensitive (unintelligible)."

"A hell of a lot of people will like that answer. They would. And it makes anybody else who asked any other question on it look like a selfish son-of-a-bitch, which I thoroughly intended them to look like."

A White House spokesman said last night that there would be "no comment whatsoever" on the transcript.