

The Name Was Renschburg?

Three months before he proudly named William H. Rehnquist to the Supreme Court, President Nixon denounced his assistant attorney general as part of a "group of clowns" fumbling an investigation of national security leaks.

The transcript of a taped July 24, 1971, White House meeting quotes Mr. Nixon as complaining to domestic adviser John D. Ehrlichman: "Nobody follows up on a God damn thing. You remember the meeting we had when I told that group of clowns we had around here. Renschburg and that group. What's his name?"

"Rehnquist," Ehrlichman said. "Yeah. Rehnquist," Mr. Nixon said, finally getting it right.

In announcing two Supreme Court appointments on Oct. 21, 1971, Mr. Nixon told a national television audience, "Lewis Powell. William Rehnquist. Those are names you will remember, because they will add distinction and excellence in the highest degree to the Supreme Court of the United States."

Justice Rehnquist has disqualified himself from the pending high court test of President Nixon's claim of executive privilege over 64 more White House tapes. He has said publicly that he probably will not sit in any case that involves his former immediate superior, ex-Attorney General John N. Mitchell.