

Nixon Rejected Proposals In 1973 to Destroy Tapes

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

President Nixon received and reject proposals from aides in mid-1973 that the White House tapes on Watergate and other matters be destroyed, a White House aide confirmed yesterday.

The aide, who declined to be identified by name, told the Washington Post that various suggestions were aired about disposition of the tapes but the President decided it would be wrong to destroy them and might even be considered by some as grounds for his impeachment.

This aide said that as far as he knew the proposals went to Mr. Nixon after existence of the taping system was publicly disclosed on July 16, 1973. But the Cox Newspapers' Washington bureau, which reported the proposals yesterday said that the suggestion actually went to the President prior to public disclosure.

The Cox story also reported on an "administratively confidential" memorandum to Mr. Nixon dated July 25, 1973, from Patrick J. Buchanan, the White House media expert and sometimes Nixon speechwriter. In it, Buchanan urged the President to screen out and burn tapes that might be damaging to him.

The memo specifically proposed the burning of tapes "exclusive of the so-called Watergate tapes," but the reference was ambiguous as to whether the Watergate tapes as well were to be burned. Buchanan, in an interview yesterday, said there was "no recommendation of any evidentiary material being destroyed."

"Can the President be certain of the final disposition of those tapes, that only sympathetic or objective historians

will ultimately inspect them?"

Buchanan asked in the memo, "Unless the President can guarantee this into perpetuity, then, in my judgment, the President should exercise now selectivity over which tapes are preserved and which are not."

"If there are conversations with confidential aides, such as Charles Colson or Bob Haldefan (exclusive of the so-called Watergate tapes) that are better left confidential forever—what then is the sense of their preservation? Perhaps the President should be provided with a day-by-day log of his tape library, and himself separate the wheat from the chaff—from his own recollection—and have the latter burned. If such a program is undertaken, it should be announced, not in advance, but as a fait accompli."

Buchanan said yesterday that he doesn't know for sure whether the President ever saw his memo, but believes he did. At any rate, he said, he never discussed it with Mr. Nixon later.

Buchanan also warned the President in the memo that if he decided not to release any of the tapes "we should not delude ourselves as to the consequences." He would lose support, Buchanan warned, and therefore should go on the attack to try to make up lost ground.

Buchanan recommended that the President publicly attack, privately warn or even fire then-Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, whom he characterized as the head of a "Fifth Column . . . dominated by McGovern-Kennedy types" within the administration bent on destroying it. "Cox's army within the



PATRICK J. BUCHANAN
... warned President

Nixon administration is like a loose cannon lurching around the deck of a wooden ship," he wrote.

To reverse the erosion of Watergate, Buchanan urged the President to "elevate Watergate to an American Dreyfus Affair"—a reference to the conviction of a French army captain for treason in 1894 that polarized the French people.

Buchanan recommended that the public focus be switched "from a question of whether the President 'knew' of the cover-up where 70 percent of the nation is against us—to a question of whom do you wish to govern this nation—the President or the men who would destroy him?"

The White House adviser observed that his aides had been providing Mr. Nixon with a legal defense, "not recognizing fully that we are confronted with a political assault."

"Our adversaries do not simply wish to show Nixon 'involvement,'" he wrote, "they wish to castrate the President, to strangle the New Majority in its crib, to reverse the democratic verdict at the polls in November. The Left has an enormous stake in Watergate; they have really nothing else; and they fully intend the exploitation of this scandal to cancel the Nixon Counter-Revolution."

Buchanan called on the President to make a speech "stripped of the 'mea culpa' rhetoric" of two earlier Watergate explanations, admitting some error, but charging the opposition "with equal misdeeds" and "seeking to destroy the democratic mandate of 1972, and attempting to reimpose upon the American people the policies, programs and personalities vomited up in a thousand voting booths across the nation in November." He urged the President to "break it off—who will govern America, Them or Us?"

Of the speech, Buchanan observed: "If we have to drift into demagoguery, so be it—we owe them a few."

He proposed that the time had come to clearly enunciate policy decisions that would sharpen the administration's differences with its foes, including endorsement of the anti-busing amendment and of the anti-abortion amendment . . . "a strong moral issue dividing the New Majority from the Old Elite."

"It has been said that to divert the attention of their people, dictators start foreign wars or create foreign devils," Buchanan concluded. "We already have some domestic devils—we need a different fight."