

Tapes Show 4 Methods of Cover-up Eyed

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President Nixon discussed four separate ways to cover-up White House involvement in the Watergate during a crucial March 22, 1973 meeting with top aides, an examination of the transcript shows.

It was during this meeting that the President told former Attorney General John N. Mitchell:

"I don't give a s— what happens. I want you all to stonewall it, let them plead the Fifth Amendment, coverup or anything else, if it'll save the plan. That's the whole point."

During Wednesday's impeachment debate by the House Judiciary Committee, defenders of the President, including Rep. Charles W. Sandman (R-N.J.), have cited the President's next statement as evidence that the President was only considering options. Mr. Nixon continued:

"On the other hand, uh, uh, I would prefer, as I said to you, that you do it the other way."

During the two-hour meeting, which covers 40 pages in the House Judiciary Committee transcript, neither the President nor his aides considered making a full disclosure of Watergate facts. Instead, according to the transcript, the President and his aides discussed three additional ways to organize concealment of the facts. They were:

- Making what the President described as a "deal" with Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), then the newly appointed vice chairman of the Senate Watergate committee, who could limit disclosure.

- A limited waiver of executive privilege for a few aides who would testify in closed-door sessions. In the President's own words this limited waiver would keep convicted Watergate conspirators E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy from testifying. The President said that "we are not in a position to have, uh, to, uh, to cross the bridge in terms of saying that Hunt and Liddy will go down and testify..."

- Have presidential counsel John W. Dean III draft a

report that would show that nobody in the White House was involved. This "Dean report" would then be sent to the Watergate committee.

The President discussed this option the day after Dean informed him of extensive White House involvement in the Watergate cover-up.

Presidential adviser John D. Ehrlichman, who was also present at the meeting, described the benefits of a "Dean report."

"And I am looking to the future," Ehrlichman said, "assuming that some corner of this thing comes unstuck at some time, you're then in a position to say, 'Look, that document I published is the document I relied on, that's the report I relied on.'"

White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, who also attended the meeting, said that these alternatives—which were not necessarily separate and could all be part of the overall strategy—were a "limited hang-out."

Dean agreed with the term, but Ehrlichman called it "a modified limited hang-out."

In discussing a possible Dean report, the President said to his counsel: "All of your analysis, and so forth, you, you're, you have found and very carefully put down that this individual, that individual, that individual, were not involved. We're going (unintelligible) to have to presume that. Rather than going into every leaked story and other charge, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and knock this, this, this, this, this, this down."

The day before, Dean had informed the President that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell and Dean could all be indicted.

In the March 22 meeting, after the President said he would prefer the "other way," he said, "up to this point, the whole theory has been containment, as you know, John (Mitchell)."

"Yeah," Mitchell responded.

"And now, now we're shifting," the President said. "As far as I'm concerned, actually from a personal standpoint, if you weren't making a personal sacrifice it's unfair—Haldeman and Dean. That's what (President) Eisenhower—that's all he cared about. He only cared about—Christ, 'Be sure he was clean.' Both in the fund thing and the (Sherman) Adams thing. But I don't look at it that way. And I just—that's the thing I am really concerned with. We're going to protect our people, if we can."