

Nixon Admits He Slowed
Watergate Break-in Probe

Tapes Say Nixon OK'd Coverup

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President Nixon personally agreed to a coverup of the facts of Watergate within six days after the illegal entry into the Democrats' national headquarters on June 17, 1972, according to three new transcripts of Nixon's conversations released by the White House yesterday.

The transcripts, recounting conversations on June 23, 1972, between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman, then his White House chief of staff, completely undermine the President's previous insistence that he was uninvolved in the coverup.

Instead, the transcripts show the President directed efforts to hide the involvement of his aides in the Watergate break-in through a series of orders to conceal crucial details about the break-in already known to himself but not to the FBI.

Specifically, the transcripts show that by June 23, 1972, Mr. Nixon had been informed by Haldeman that presidential campaign funds could be traced through Mexico and elsewhere to one of the Watergate burglars.

In addition, Haldeman informed Mr. Nixon that he believed former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, then the President's re-election campaign manager, knew in advance of the Watergate operation.

In response, the transcripts demonstrate, Mr. Nixon approved a plan to have the Central Intelligence Agency falsely claim that a full FBI investigation into Watergate would expose covert operations of the agency.

Previously, the President has insisted that he had ap-

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proved such a plan only in the interests of "national security" and that political considerations played no role in his decision.

The transcripts demonstrated that exactly the opposite was the case.

Haldeman first proposed the coverup scheme, according to the transcripts at a morning meeting in which he told Mr. Nixon:

"You know the Democratic break-in thing, we're back in the problem area because the FBI is not under control, because (acting FBI director L. Patrick) Gray doesn't exactly know how to control it and they have — their investigation is now leading into some productive areas — . . . and it goes in

some directions we don't want it to go."

Haldeman suggested having CIA deputy director Vernon Walters tell Gray, "Stay to hell out of this, this is ah, business here we don't want you to go any further on it."

Then Haldeman told the President that a \$25,000 check from Minnesota businessman Kenneth H. Dahlberg and a presidential campaign contribution from Texas could be traced through Mexico to the Watergate burglars.

Haldeman, according to the transcripts, then asked the President about how to handle the FBI probe: "And you seem to think the thing to do is get them to stop?"

"Right, fine," the President replied.

From that moment on, the transcripts make clear, the Watergate coverup was in motion with the full knowledge, acquiescence and even direction of the President.

Moments later in that initial 95-minute conversation on the morning of June 23, the President specifically described what Haldeman should tell the CIA:

"When you get in — when you get in (unintelligible) people, say, 'Look the problem is that this will open the whole Bay of Pigs thing, and the President just feels that

ah, without going into the details — don't, don't lie to them to the extent to say there is no involvement, but just say this is a comedy of errors without getting into it, the President believes that it is going to open the

whole Bay of Pigs thing up again."

"And, ah," the President continued, "Because these people are plugging for (unintelligible) and that they should call the FBI in and (unintelligible) don't go any further into this case period!"

The transcripts also seem to indicate that, on June 23, the President somehow suspected or knew of the involvement of former White House aide G. Gordon Liddy in the break-in several days before that fact became known to the FBI. Liddy was later convicted of being the operational chief of the break-in team.

After being informed that Mitchell probably knew in advance about the break-in, the President asked Haldeman: "He (Mitchell) didn't know how it was going to be handled though — with Dahlberg and the Texans and so forth? Well, who was the asshole that did? Is it Liddy? Is that the fellow? He must be a little nuts!"

"He is," Haldeman replied.

According to the transcript, Haldeman had not mentioned Liddy's name previously. It is not known why the President suspected Liddy at that point. The FBI did not learn of Liddy's possible involvement until several days later.

In the same conversation, Haldeman also told the President that the only way to get the CIA to call off the FBI was for the White House to order it. "They say the only way to do that is from the White House instructions," Haldeman said.

He then told the President that the FBI suspected that the White House might be involved, as well as the CIA and Cubans with CIA connections.

Mr. Nixon then said that, "I'm not going to get that involved," apparently voicing reluctance to personally contact CIA officials.

"No, sir, we don't want

you to," Haldeman replied.

"You call them in," the President said, thus effectively insulating himself.

"Good deal," Haldeman said.

"Play it tough," the President said. "That's the way they play it and that's the way we are going to play it."

In the conversation between Haldeman and the President, held early that afternoon, Mr. Nixon inquired about former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt Jr., whose name had been linked publicly with the Watergate burglary several days earlier.

" . . . This fellow Hunt," the President said. "Ah, he knows too damned much if he was involved — you happen to know that? If it gets out that this is all involved, the Cuba thing it would be a fiasco. It would make the CIA look bad, it's going to make Hunt look bad . . ."

An hour later, in the third meeting with the President that day, Haldeman reported that he had spoken to Walters. "I just said," Haldeman said, "that the thing was leading into directions that were going to create problems because they were exploring leads that led back into areas that would be harmful to the CIA and harmful to the government."

The CIA did get the FBI to postpone some crucial interviews for more than a week, according to previous testimony in the Watergate case.

In discussing this, the President said in one of his most detailed previous Watergate statements said:

"Elements of the early post-Watergate reports led me to suspect, incorrectly, that the CIA had been in some way involved . . . I sought to prevent the exposure of these covert national security activities, while encouraging those conducting the investigation to pursue their inquiry into the Watergate itself."

At no time before the release of the transcripts yesterday had the President ever acknowledged that such orders were given for political reasons and to hide the involvement of his own aides in the Watergate break-in.



PRESIDENT NIXON AND H. R. HALDEMAN
Three transcripts were released of their meetings six days after the break-in