

WXPost

Says Impeachment Not Justified

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By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Nixon said yesterday, in a major reversal of earlier statements, that he had withheld information on the Watergate cover-up both from the public and from his own attorneys.

In a statement likely to hasten the impeachment process, if it does not lead first to resignation, Mr. Nixon said his claim that he learned first of the cover-up in March, 1973, was "incomplete and in some respects erroneous."

While acknowledging that a vote to impeach him in the House is "virtually a foregone conclusion," he nevertheless said that the record "does not justify the extreme step of impeachment and removal of a President."

The President's decision to issue the statement, it was learned, came after his legal counsel, James D. St. Clair, threatened to resign if Mr. Nixon did not make it clear that St.

Clair had not known about some of yesterday's revelations. As an alternative St. Clair had indicated that he would issue his own clarifying statement.

Mr. Nixon released his two-page statement in late afternoon. It was accompanied by edited transcripts of three conversations with former aide H. R. (Bob) Haldeman on June 23, 1972, six days after the Watergate break-in.

On May 22, 1973, Mr. Nixon had said that after the break-in he directed the FBI to stay out of certain activities involving the Central Intelligence Agency because of national security considerations.

Yesterday, however, the President said a review of the June 23, 1972, conversation showed he "also discussed the political aspects of the situation."

The tape recording also discloses that six days after the break-in Haldeman told him he thought that former Attorney General John N.

Mitchell knew of the break-in in advance.

The tapes are among those being turned over to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica. The President said the portions of the 64 taped conversations that Sirica decides are relevant to Watergate cases will also be given to the House Judiciary Committee and to the Senate.

The President spent nearly all of last week listening to the 64 conversations the Supreme Court ordered him to turn over to Sirica. He spent part of the weekend conferring with aides at Camp David, Md., and returned to the White House early yesterday.

He had only one official appointment last week and none yesterday.

The President said he made a "preliminary review" of some of the 64 conversations in May.

Among those were the conversations with Haldeman of June 23, 1972.

See PRESIDENT, A10, Col. 1

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President Admits Withholding Data; Tapes Show He Approved Cover-up

PRESIDENT, From A1

"Although I recognized that these presented potential problems, I did not inform my staff or my counsel of it, or those arguing my case, not did I amend my submission to the Judiciary Committee in order to include and reflect it," the President said.

"At the time, I did not realize the extent of the implications which these conversations might now appear to have. As a result, those arguing my case, as well as those passing judgment on the case, did so with information that was incomplete and in some respects erroneous.

"This was a serious act of omission for which I take full responsibility and which I deeply regret."

Since the Supreme Court decision ordering him to supply the tapes, the President said, he listened to more of the tapes and directed St. Clair to analyze them.

The President's statement, handed to reporters shortly after 4 p.m. after a day of suspense and no briefings at the White House, also acknowledged a misleading statement regarding instructions to the FBI to coordinate with the CIA to avoid leaks relating to national security.

"That statement was based on my recollection at the time—some 11 months later—plus documentary materials and relevant public testimony of those involved," the President said.

"The June 23 tapes clearly show, however, that at the time I gave those instructions I also discussed the political aspects of the situation, and

that I was aware of the advantages this course of action would have with respect to limiting possible public exposure of involvement by persons connected with the reelection committee."

Despite the acknowledgment that he had on two occasions provided erroneous information, Mr. Nixon claimed that his review of additional tapes has so far "shown no other major inconsistencies with what I have previously submitted."

Mr. Nixon said he recognized this additional material "may further damage my case, especially because attention will be drawn separately to it rather than to the evidence in its entirety."

In an appeal to judge the evidence "in its entirety," the President said the result of his June 23 instructions nevertheless was to provoke a full FBI investigation.

"Whatever mistakes I made in the handling of Watergate, the basic truth remains that when all the facts were brought to my attention I insisted on a full investigation and prosecution of those guilty," Mr. Nixon said.

"I am firmly convinced that the record, in its entirety, does not justify the extreme step of impeachment and removal of a President. I trust that as the constitutional process goes forward, this perspective will prevail."

Haldeman and the President also discussed a variety of other matters, including their low opinion of former White House communications director Herbert G. Klein, the fact that Mrs. Nixon's hair would be blown by helicopter blades, the latest public opinion polls and the President's refusal to consider briefings of Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern.

One exchange showed the President telling Haldeman that Rose Mary Woods, the President's principal secretary and a person who never got along with Haldeman, should be in the meeting.

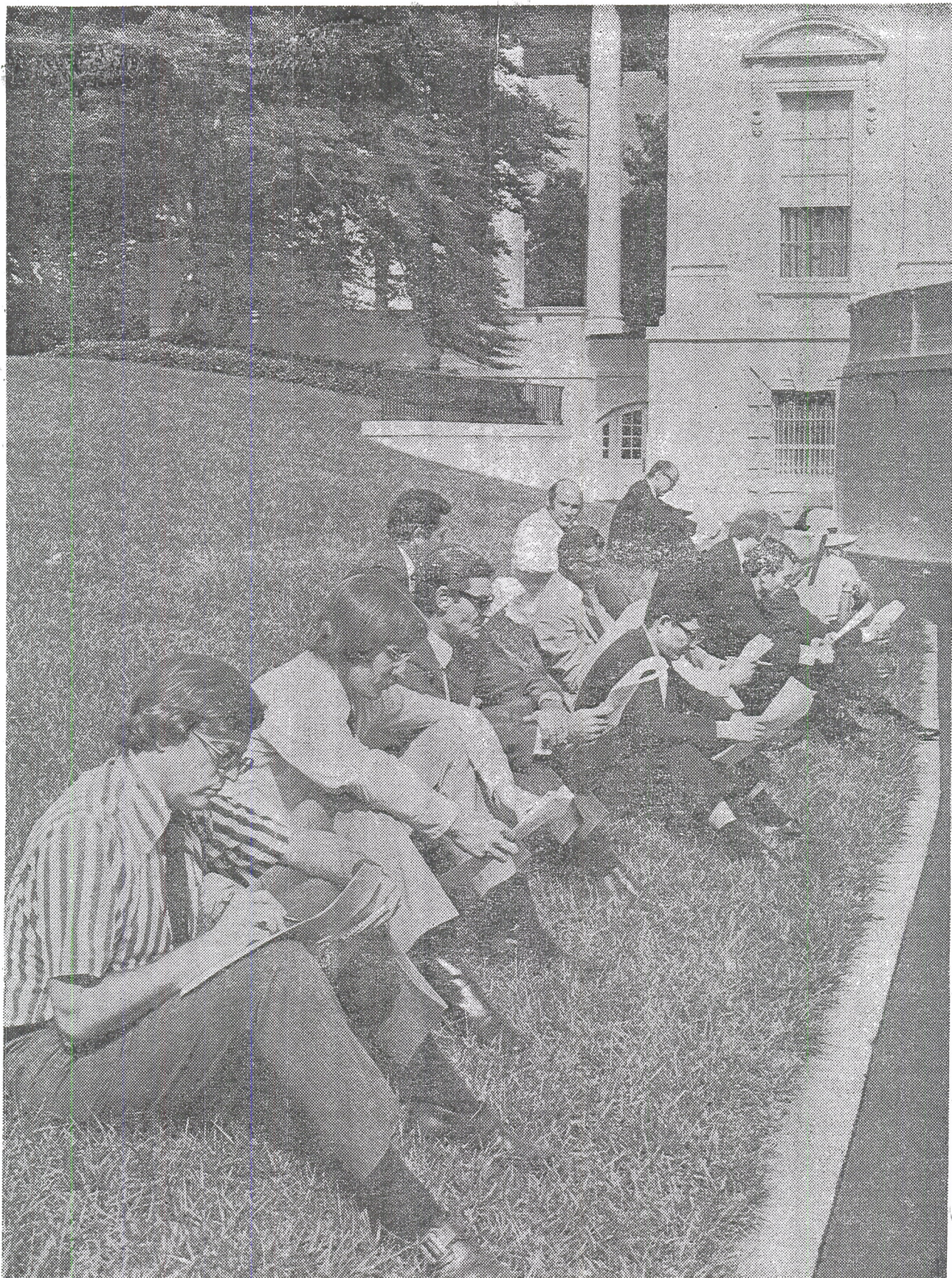
"No," Haldeman replied, "well let her in if you want to . . ."

The President, after hearing Haldeman suggest that Mitchell knew in advance about the break-in, said, "Thank God it wasn't Colson," a reference to former aide Charles W. Colson, now serving a prison sentence for obstruction of justice.

In an economic discussion, Haldeman told the President that Federal Reserve Board Chairman Arthur F. Burns was concerned about speculation against the Italian lira.

"Well, I don't give a (expletive deleted) about the lira," the President replied.

The President complained about a meeting Klein held



By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

Newsmen gather on the lawn outside the White House to digest President Nixon's latest statement on his tapes.

in which the President was asked many questions.

President: "You've just not got to let Klein ever set up a meeting again. He just doesn't have his head screwed on. You know what I mean. He just opens it up and sits there with eggs on his face. He's just not our guy at all, is he?"

Haldeman: No.

President: Absolutely, totally unorganized.

Haldeman: He's a very nice guy.

President: People love him but damn is he unorganized.

There followed a considerable discussion of whether Mrs. Nixon and the Nixon daughters should stay in a Miami Beach hotel or at the Key Biscayne residence during the 1972 Republican National Convention.

Mrs. Nixon said getting on and off helicopters "destroys their hair and so forth," the President commented.

"Of course," the President added, "as you know, our primary aim is to see that they are on television (unintelligible) coming into the hall."

When Haldeman suggested that the Nixon women go to Miami early and added that the President should not go until Tuesday of convention week, the President replied: "I don't want to go near the damned place until Tuesday. I don't want to be near it"

Last night, the President took his wife and daughters Julie Eisenhower and Tricia Cox on a cruise on the presidential yacht Sequoia. C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, who had been a Nixon house guest since last Thursday, returned yesterday to his home in Key Biscayne.