

WXPost Amidst Mussed Hair and

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The smoking gun which they found on the President's desk was almost buried by the clutter of warped trivia which occupied his mind.

Richard Nixon and his accomplice, Haldeman, talked about so many things on that fateful day in 1972, six days after the Watergate break-in, while the secret tape recorder took down their words for posterity.

The President's pick for all-time greats of baseball, Jews and the arts and his desire to stay away from both of them. The problem of helicopter prop-wash mussing his wife's hairdo. The prospect of homosexuals embarrassing the Democrats at Miami Beach.

Scattered among those random topics are the words which now threaten to bring down the Nixon government, the President's own expression of consent for the cover-up conspiracy that has blossomed into a historic scandal.

Beyond the damaging words themselves, their context seems so shocking now, two years later. The fatal words, the directive to cover-up Watergate involvement, seemed utterly routine and self-assured, set in a conversation on meandering banality, one item of chit-chat among many.

"Three or four things," the President said. "Pat raised the point last night that probably she and he and the girls ought to stay in a hotel on Miami Beach. First she says the moment they get the helicopter and get off and so forth, it destroys their hair and so forth."

No problem, says Haldeman, they'll

go by car. But what about the traffic? "They should have an escort," his aide promises.

A few moments before, his aide was promising to shut off the dangerous FBI investigation of Watergate.

"You call them in," Mr. Nixon said.

"Good deal," said Haldeman.

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

He does not seem so tough, though, in that rambling dialogue of June 23. Like the earlier transcripts which the President reluctantly made public in April, this conversation draws its own debasing portrait of Nixon the man, quite apart from the evidence it provides toward his impeachment. His petty concerns and obsessions, his folk prejudices, are as clear as the pistol.

Mr. Nixon, for instance, had a thing about his own past, reliving his failed campaign of 1960, pouring over his own autobiographical account of his career, "Six Crises." He kept returning to the book, re-reading it at night in search of lessons, urging it upon his subordinates.

"Actually, the book reads awfully well," the President told Haldeman, who agreed.

"... that Six Crises is a damned good book," the President reminded Haldeman at another point, "and the (unintelligible) story reads like a novel—the Hiss case—Caracas was fascinating. The campaign, of course, for anybody in politics should be a must because it had a lot in there of how politicians are like."

Haldeman assured him that he had

read the book several times. Mr. Nixon mentioned another memory from its pages.

"Is that in the book?" Haldeman asked.

"It's in the book! Hell yes, it's in the book," the President exclaimed.

Distribute the book among the campaign staffers, Nixon insisted. Order them to read it. For a moment, he wondered aloud about his old writer, Alvin Moscow, who helped with the volume. The more Mr. Nixon thought about his

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past, the better it seemed to him.

"It may be," he mused, "that our '60 campaign (unintelligible) was extremely much more effective..."

The President's political obsessions were obvious. He returned to the smallest detail, the Gallup Polls of Eisenhower, Johnson and Kennedy compared with his own ratings, the camera set-up's for photos with friendly congressmen, the Washington Post's lead editorial on George McGovern.

They were discussing debt-ceiling legislation when Mr. Nixon offered a cynical appraisal: "Their ain't a vote in it... There's no votes in it, Bob." Haldeman agreed.

"Well, what the hell," said the President, "why not accomplish one thing while we're here?"

"Maybe we will," said his lieutenant.

"Yep, not bad."

"In spite of ourselves," Haldeman added.

Baseball, the Smoking Gun

"O.K.," said the President, "what else have you got that's amusing today?"

The transcript's endless political talk refutes one of the main defense arguments which Mr. Nixon has offered from time to time over the past two years, namely, that he was too busy in the summer of 1972 with high diplomacy and foreign policy to bother with the details of Watergate. On the contrary, the June 23 meeting shows him intrigued with political trivia and turned off by the foreign-policy issues.

"You get the report that the British floated the pound?" Haldeman asked.

"No, I don't think so," Nixon replied.

"They did."

Mr. Nixon brushed aside the British pound. "I don't care about it," he said. "Nothing we can do about it." Haldeman continued anyway. "It's too complicated for me to get into," the President insisted.

He had even less time for the Italian lira.

"Burns is concerned," Haldeman reported, "about speculation about the lira."

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

Foreign policy issues were useful, however, for votes, especially the China and Russia tours. "I just think you've got to hit that over and over again," Mr. Nixon said. "We gotta win—"

Like those earlier transcripts, this new one also reveals flashes of Mr. Nixon's personal distastes, even for an old friend, like Herb Klein, his political

ally for a generation. Klein had arranged a meeting between the President and TV executives which Mr. Nixon didn't like because the businessmen sounded off.

"And look," the President said, "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 egg on his face. He's just not our guy at all is he?"

The President also expressed some distaste for Jews. His daughter, Julie, he complained, had been scheduled for an appearance at an art museum in Jacksonville, Fla.

"... now the worse thing (unintelligible) is to go anything that has to do with arts," the President insisted. "... the arts, you know—they're Jews, they're left-wing—in other words, stay away. Make a point."

"Sure," said Haldeman.

"Middle America—put that word out," Mr. Nixon directed. "... relate it to Middle America and not the elitists..."

One touching note was Mr. Nixon's ambivalence toward his family. He discusses his wife and two daughters coldly as a valuable political commodity, but he is also concerned that they are being over-worked or sent to embarrassing events.

"Of course, as you know, our primary aim is to see that they are on television (unintelligible) coming into the hall (unintelligible) shooting the Hall (unintelligible) plan on television," the President said of his family.

"My point is I think it would be really great if they did the delegations of the big states."

Haldeman warned against over-exposure: "There's a strong view on the part of some of our strategists that we should be damned careful not to over use them and cheapen them. That they should—there is a celebrity value you can lose by rubbing on them too much..."

The President complained that his daughter Tricia had encountered some rude moments in recent campaigning, booing demonstrators and hostile reporters.

"What's your off-hand reaction on that, Bob?" he asked. "I do not want them, though, to go in and get the hell kicked (unintelligible)."

The President seemed satisfied, however, with his own limited campaigning. The day before, he had held a rare press conference in the Oval Office, filled with political promises on busing, tax reform, food prices, arms limitation.

"How's your coverage?" he asked.

"Good newspaper play—lousy television," Haldeman reported.

At the press conference, there was one question about Watergate and Mr. Nixon was ready with an answer.

"... As Mr. Ziegler has stated, the White House has had no involvement whatever in this particular business," the President told the American public two years ago. "As far as the matter now is concerned, it is under investigation, as it should be, by the proper legal authorities..."