

Excerpts From Transcripts of Four Tapes

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Following are excerpts from transcripts of tape-recorded conversations involving President Nixon, John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman that were played today at the Watergate cover-up trial. Asterisks indicate omitted passages.

President, Ehrlichman

April 19, 1973, from 1:03 P.M. to 1:30 P.M.

PRESIDENT: Now let me put, put one other question to you right. Very painful, I know it's very painful for you to think of this, and it is for me too, but anyway, but, uh, I think it would be helpful if you had this consideration when you talk the rest of the day, this and that bother you the rest of the day I hope. I think the separation problem has to be considered. I want you to look at it very coldly, not in terms of Bob, in terms of the President, the needs that we have and have had, and have Mr., Mr. so and so, look at this thing, in terms of whether it's going to be bad, and what, how you are involved, what Dean may say. Don't know what the son-of-a-bitch is going to say. I don't know what you do with the Dean (unintelligible) he's obviously very upset. He's just lashing out. Goddammit, I don't know what we've been told. I just don't know, John. Frankly, I'm at a loss. We were all talking frankly, that's why the counsel was sworn.

EHRlichman: Well, as I said ...

PRESIDENT: That Goddam Dean.

EHRlichman: As I said this morning, I think you can very truthfully and logically and properly say that ...

PRESIDENT: I was trying to buy, I was trying, I was really trying to probe his thought process. I went down every road we possibly could ...

EHRlichman: Exactly right.

PRESIDENT: ... and see where we were.

EHRlichman: And it paid off. You see, you're the one who then came back and said, "I've got to have that all written down. Send that man to Camp David if necessary and let's get it all down." That's when he was uncovered.

PRESIDENT: I suppose that really isn't true.

EHRlichman: Well ...

PRESIDENT: Not that he was uncovered, it was simply the fact that he said, "By God, this thing is such a cancer and so forth that I can't write it and there's no way we make a statement," and I said to you, John, "You better get into it." Take ...

EHRlichman: Yes, but I happen to be ...

PRESIDENT: Well ...

EHRlichman: This may be some measure of hindsight, but I really don't think it is

of Nixon Conversations With Aides

because my very conscious contemporary reaction when Dean came back and didn't have anything for us, was shoops, there's something more here, because Dean could have constructed some kind of an artful ah, ah, evasion if he hadn't been so pervasively involved.

PRESIDENT: (unintelligible)

EHRlichman: For the, for the campaign committee or the White House, or whoever he wanted to protect, but, uh, the thing that he couldn't, he couldn't write it. I just had a mental image of the guy sitting there with big piles of paper saying, "I've just written a confession, and I would be nuts to deliver this to anybody."

PRESIDENT: Well, that's what we have to say.

President, Haldeman and Ehrlichman

April 25, 1973, from 11:06 P.M. to 1:55 P.M.

EHRlichman: ... I think it's entirely conceivable that if Dean is totally out of control and if matters are not handled adroitly that you could get a resolution of impeachment ...

PRESIDENT: That's right. EHRlichman: ... in the Senate ...

PRESIDENT: That's right. EHRlichman: ... I don't know if you've thought of this or not, but I got thinking about it last night. Uh, on the ground that you committed a crime.

PRESIDENT: Right. EHRlichman: Uh, and that there is no other legal process available to, uh, uh, the United States people, other than ...

PRESIDENT: Right. EHRlichman: ... other than impeachment. Otherwise, you have immunity from prosecution.

PRESIDENT: Right. EHRlichman: Uh, so I think we have to, I think we have to think about that. We have to (unintelligible) ...

PRESIDENT: Right. EHRlichman: ... And see about, see what the point is, is it a crime, if any, and uh, how serious it is, and would Dean, is a threat, and

what we do about it. Uh, my own analysis is that what he has falls far short of any commission of a crime by you. So far as I know.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. EHRlichman: I don't know what you may have talked about with him in those ten or twelve hours you and he spent there in the months, months of February and March.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. EHRlichman: ... uh, yet it's manageable. (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: Yeah. (unintelligible). PRESIDENT: ... a million dollars. And I said facetiously, "Well, I guess we can get a million dollars." It was then that we started my whole investigation. Now, I don't know, how does that one sound to you?

PRESIDENT: Yeah. EHRlichman: ... uh, yet it's manageable. (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: Uh, but, uh, you get down to a point where you've got John Dean prancing in there and saying, "The President said this and the President said that," and having somebody in your behalf come back and say, "No, the President didn't say that, and that's ridiculous." Uh, and, and, so you get a kind of credibility thing unless, like he seems to be doing, he's very busy, uh, dredging up corroborating evidence and looking for documentation or taking statements from people based on leads that may have developed from those conversations. And I think really the only way that I know to make a judgment on this is for you to listen to your tapes and see what actually was said the, or maybe for Bob to do, or or, somebody. See what was said there. And then analyze how big a threat that is.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: If it didn't come out of those meetings, then I think it's imaginary.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: Because it then does not come out of your mouth, it comes by reason of the actions of, or something that one of us said or did and it can be handled. But if you're really confronted with that kind of a dilemma, or that kind of crisis in this thing, uh, I think before any other steps are taken, any precipitous steps (unintelligible) on us for that matter, uh, you better damn sure know ...

PRESIDENT: That's right. EHRlichman: ... what your hole card is.

PRESIDENT: I agree.

SET ASTERISK

PRESIDENT: ... (unintelligible) I think I remember, I would everything, remember except, you see there's always a possibility that Dean may have discussed this case with (unintelligible). I know the Bittman conversation, you know ...

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: ... I know however, that in that conversation, the question was raised of blackmail—I know, however, that in that conversation, I also raised the question how much is it going to, would it cost ...

HALDEMAN: Yeah. (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: ... a million dollars. And I said facetiously, "Well, I guess we can get a million dollars." It was then that we started my whole investigation. Now, I don't know, how does that one sound to you?

PRESIDENT: Yeah. EHRlichman: ... uh, yet it's manageable. (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Right.

President, Haldeman

April 25, 1973, from
4:40 P.M. to 5:30 P.M.

PRESIDENT: Hi, come on in.

HALDEMAN: Well, that is hard work. Good God! It's amazing it works awfully well . . . and, uh, it's hard as hell to hear you, so you gotta keep looking back and re-working.

PRESIDENT: It's pretty frustrating, but, uh—

HALDEMAN: It's, it's in there. There is the meeting where—this is the meeting in the morning of March 21st (tape noise) had Ehrlichman for an hour at first. Then you had Steve in and talked about the plan for going to Key Biscayne the next night after your meeting with Shultz . . .

(Mr. Haldeman then summarized the March 21, 1973, conversation between Mr. Nixon and John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel.)

HALDEMAN: . . . Apparently, some more on there is, there is, uh, I would say that confirms your recollection pretty much the way you said it—the way you recalled it—well, I say though that, well . . . (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: . . . We can get the money.

PRESIDENT: . . . We can get the money.

HALDEMAN: Okay. But you didn't do it and we're drawing him out on the question of what, what's in the box.

PRESIDENT: Money, what could we do with it? You get the money, how do ya deliver it? Yeah.

HALDEMAN: That's . . . PRESIDENT: . . . That really (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: Okay. You're drawing Dean out on what he's talking about here.

PRESIDENT: You have to know exactly what he has.

HALDEMAN: And the conclusion, in fact, was, don't do it. You can't do it.

PRESIDENT: It's not a good story, best we can . . .

HALDEMAN: He raises a lot of, a lot of new stuff. That's it.

PRESIDENT: Well. The new stuff . . .

HALDEMAN: It's interesting. He's told a different story than he's told to me.

PRESIDENT: Well, (unintelligible). I said, well, that's—We gotta keep the cap on it. We can get the money, huh? But I said . . .

HALDEMAN: Ya see, you're trying it out.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: You're trying to see how far it goes. You said, "Is that your recommendation?" That's, you do that all the time. You ask people questions on the basis of—, try and see what direction they're going. That's . . . they're leading questions. But it doesn't mean that your statement to (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I said a million dollars. With a million dollars (unintelligible) clemency. You couldn't do it till after the '74 elections. That's an incriminating thing. His, his word against the President's (unintelligible) tape



John D. Ehrlichman and Judge John J. Sirica, rear, listen to tape at Watergate trial

The New York Times/John Daly Hart

recorder in his pocket.

HALDEMAN: You're smoking him out on what he thinks the alternatives are.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: . . . You're pumping him.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

asterisks—

HALDEMAN: That's—you may be pushing him there to find out whether he was set up a system of delivery and all that, which he didn't.

PRESIDENT: What I'm really setting up there, putting the best light on a, on a bad situation, is basic, basically, I'm saying, "Well, get the money, but uh, we should try to cut it off and so forth—but how do you do it?"

HALDEMAN: You're being blackmailed, here on this specific question of, of the national security point. Because what Hunt was holding ya up on, was not on the Watergate.

PRESIDENT: Still, still—

HALDEMAN: But, but on the, other, seamy work for Ehrlichman. All the other defendants were also involved in this.

Trying to Get the Facts

PRESIDENT: The matter was my trying to get the facts, the truth, and that's the (unintelligible) . . .

HALDEMAN: You're, you're probing.

PRESIDENT: Right here. I'm interested in a cost, right?

HALDEMAN: You (unintelligible), you never said this is, You, you asked leading questions. You nev—, you said, well, We can get the money, that's no problem. You just see, (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Well, but I said we oughta, uh, at least we ought to take care of that, didn't I say that though?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, but that was to lead him on into the question of how, to

handle the money. And he didn't buy. He said, "I don't know. You ought to get busy on—if you gonna do that Mitchell ought to take care of it." Which is kind of interesting. You were trying to smoke out wheeter Dean knew how to handle money. And was involved in this payoff stuff and it was clear he wasn't. He didn't know how to handle it, didn't give you any answer to the question, said, "You ought to—that Mitchell ought to do that, get some pros to handle it" . . .

PRESIDENT: I may have said later (unintelligible) do what you can on it.

HALDEMAN: Well, you may be, may be dead—I, I don't think you did.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: It probably is, if you didn't raise at (hush money payments) with Mitchell and Dean, you probably raised it with Ehrlichman, Dean and me and one of us probably said that Mitchell said something this morning about it, and . . .

PRESIDENT: Yes, I . . .

HALDEMAN: . . . I think

that's no problem or something like that.

PRESIDENT: So that's that.

HALDEMAN: That's it.

PRESIDENT: . . . You think he'll say that—that we were aware of it? (unintelligible-tape noise).

HALDEMAN: At that point, you're trying to bust the case. You're not worrying about individual acts, at that point in time. You're trying to open up what the hell's going on here. And you don't know whether to believe this guy at this point. You're starting to wonder. That's quite, quite true at this point too that uh, we discussed the

the money situation, raising the money (unintelligible). I said, "That's wrong," didn't I? Oh, wrong on clemency.

HALDEMAN: No, you said getting the money was wrong.

PRESIDENT: Hm?

HALDEMAN: You said that, that approach would be wrong.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: . . . trying to get the money. No, because I don't think you felt that clemency was wrong. Justification for clemency on Hunt.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: Because of his family, and he then, actually you'd talked about it for all of them because, because the people they really are being screwed . . .

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: . . . on an equity basis.

PRESIDENT: (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: (unintelligible) you can't move in on immediate clemency. You probably may not be able to do it. But in clemency there can be compassion, not, not concern with cover-up.

PRESIDENT: Also say, we can say we considered it. Talked about,—said (unintelligible) it just won't work. (unintelligible — with tape noise). We didn't furnish any money, thank God. HALDEMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: Remember I told you later that I could get a 100,000?

HALDEMAN: That makes—that rings a bell. "cause you talked about Rose having some money or—something. I remember that.

PRESIDENT: Show Ehrlichman that memorandum (dealing with the Fielding break-in) from Kleindienst, and say we had no choice under the circumstances.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Oh, Mitchell, I mean (unintelligible) or the prosecutor in this—has had nothing from this break-in was made available. The prosecutor (unintelligible). Dean, see, informed them of the Ellsberg break-in.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible) Petersen.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) prosecution. It'll break in the paper, it'll say that'll clear Ellsberg, Watergate buggers, tried to do this or that and the other thing. Know what I mean? This is the only proper thing to do; John he disagrees. And I—Kleindienst asked me. I said, there's no choice there.

PRESIDENT: (unintelligible) you get the money. You do all that. Where does it lead you? (unintelligible). Petersen's honorable.

HALDEMAN: If he's honorable . . .

PRESIDENT: Petersen? Petersen's (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: (unintelligible) Agnew for Vice President. Even your worst enemies don't want to do that.

HALDEMAN: I think it was, was, uh, in the process, also trying to bring home the point that we . . .

PRESIDENT: . . . that the sacking of Ehrlichman, Haldeman ain't gonna do the trick.

HALDEMAN: Well, that's right.

PRESIDENT: That's really true.

HALDEMAN: Yeah, not from a point of self-defense.

PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

HALDEMAN: We're prepared to do it, to go out on the sword if it's the right thing to do. But lacking the conviction that it's the right thing to do we're, we're, I'm sure you gonna argue the—I'm sure the point to consider, the other way . . .

PRESIDENT: Let's not drag up. (unintelligible) the wagons up around the White House. Let me say it's got to be you, Ehrlichman, and I have got to put the wagons up around the President on this particular conversation. I just wonder if the son-of-a-bitch had a recorder on him. (tape noise). I didn't notice any but I wasn't looking (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: It's almost inconceivable that the guy would try that because . . .

PRESIDENT: He was really coming in, in fact, to warn me.

HALDEMAN: Yeah, he wasn't coming in, wasn't coming in wasn't coming in for the purpose of . . .

PRESIDENT: At that point, he had hadn't made the command decision to, uh . . .

HALDEMAN: He had no thought that you were going to say anything like this. All he was coming into to tell you was that there was a problem. He wasn't expecting you to solve it, uh, uh, to solve it that way. I think you probably surprised him enormously by, by even raising this point. And I think that is a . . .

President: What what?

Haldeman: Of, you know, well, we could get the money.

President: Yeah.

Haldeman: I think that's the last thing he expected you to say.

President: What did he'd expect me to say, we can't do it?

Haldeman: What he expected you to say was well, that's an indication of another part of the problem, isn't it? He was just trying to point, he was logging, and you look at the course of this conversation, he went from that point to other points he was logging all the problems, we have, the soft spots. And they were things like Krogh, like the 350, and like this and like that, and this was one of them.

President, Haldeman

April 25, 1973, from
7:45 P.M. to 7:53 P.M.

(PHONE TAP)

PRESIDENT: Is there any, uh, way that, uh, even surreptitiously or discreetly or otherwise I mean, that, ah, way you could determine whether uh, this matter of whether Dean might have walked in there with a recorder on him? I don't know.

HALDEMAN: No, I don't think ya gotta, so remote as to be almost beyond possibility. And uh, and if he did (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Well we've gotta I mean, it's, it (unintelligible) but the point is that that's ah, that's a real bomb isn't it?

Haldeman: Ah, ya.

PRESIDENT: Sure is, that,

that's what may be his bomb. In other words he (unintelligible.)

HALDEMAN: No . . .

PRESIDENT: Put that on the desk with Henry Petersen and says, "I gotta recording of the President of the United States and here's what he said."

HALDEMAN: Well, that would be very hard.

PRESIDENT: If he did it, then we'd say, "yes. . ."

HALDEMAN: (unintelligible) virtually impossible.

PRESIDENT: (unintelligible) not virtually impossible. If he did it we'd say, "Yes, sir, that was a recording and I was investigating. . ."

HALDEMAN: That's t's right.

PRESIDENT: On the other hand (laughs) it'd be God damn hard on, I mean, he'd run that in the press that'd be (unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Well, no way to, no way to find out is there?

HALDEMAN: No, there isn't any, there isn't any (unintelligible) no way anybody would know. We have no evidence at any time under any circumstances, and I've, you know, been involved in enough, you know, what is going on that I, I just find it impossible to think that, that there would (unintelligible) you know, it could possibly be the case.

PRESIDENT: Ummm. One thing about those things, you think that you know when a fellow walks into me, and I didn't look at him closely, but you were there, Goddamn I mean, I, I'd think that it's a little, it's it's, even the smallest ones are bulky enough that you mean, with a fellow like Dean you'd sort of see that wouldn't ya, where do you carry them, in your hip pocket or your breast pocket?

HALDEMAN: Oh, under your arm, you know, where they carry a pistol holster or something.

PRESIDENT: Um hmm, ya, well . . .

HALDEMAN: (unintelligible) I really don't think it's—it's so remote as to be almost

PRESIDENT: Ya, ya

HALDEMAN: . . . realm of possibility

PRESIDENT: In this matter nothing is beyond the realm of possibility. (laughter) . . . but of course we draw the sword on that if ah, if ah . . .

HALDEMAN: (clears throat) I think if, if, if that's the subject he has in mind, that he, he's just going to do it on the basis of his own, you know, his own record afterwards, there's no check.

PRESIDENT: Oh well, on that we'll destroy him.

HALDEMAN: And ah . . .

PRESIDENT: It's his word against . . . the President's the ah, the ah, (unintelligible) you were there but particularly the President's on that (unintelligible). The only other thing is of course his conversation with regard to the, I mean, the little slip in your office the . . .

HALDEMAN: But that.

PRESIDENT: That was so casual.

HALDEMAN: I don't think you're going to have the, have the problem with that. I mean, other than, other than

perhaps an effort to, to base it on his conversation and you know, his memorandum afterwards or had he done something like that, but he didn't usually do that.

PRESIDENT: Didn't he?

HALDEMAN: Ummh ummh.

PRESIDENT: He didn't write conversations memorandum?

HALDEMAN: Not usually.

PRESIDENT: Hm. He probably did on this one. But uh, (unintelligible). HALDEMAN: As I said it sounds as if he had notes which you, you said he thought he did to sea speak from you know he might have used that ah . . .

PRESIDENT: Ya that, but I mean, but he didn't make any notes in any conversation I ever had with him, he always sat there and then probably as a (unintelligible) with a good memory, you can go back and write everything down you can remember.

HALDEMAN: Ya, ya.

PRESIDENT: But ah, he's always had or made a memorandum of the conversation afterwards and I said this and that, on the other hand, Ziegler had a good point about Dean which he made a few days ago, he said John Dean, s crede credibility is nil because . . .

HALDEMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: The Dean report has proved to be false and everything else and . . .

HALDEMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: And you have something to say and that's what we gotta have in mind here now without and John to get too Goddamned discouraged about this because basically John Dean, ah, his report, uh, that he now claims that he didn't make, his subornation of perjury, his everything else . . .

HALDEMAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: He's ah, who are the hell is to believe what he's going to say now and he's saying kit now for what purpose? He's going to be, of course, saying, "Well I, they, re making me the scape goat and all the rest, and therefore I'm going to el tell all," And he's going, and as he says, "I'll try this," his attorney says, "This Administration right up to the President," he didn't say the President but you know that's what they said.

PRESIDENT: I think if you—I think if you're in a position now, that if you gave him immunity, he would sit there the rest of our lives.

HALDEMAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: Hanging it over ya, and the point is that ah, now if he's going to have this pissing contest (unintelligible) all right, bring it out and fight it out and it'll be a bloody Goddamn thing, you know in a strang kind of way that's life, isn't it (unintelligible) probably be understood and be rough as a cob, an we'll survive and some people you'll even find (unintelligible) in Mississippi. You'll find a half a dozen

people that will be for the President. Who knows?

HALDEMAN: (Laughs) be a lot more than that.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) No. we do still have some support in the country, I hope. But, ah. . .

HALDEMAN: Yep.

PRESIDENT: But we shall see, do you agree?

HALDEMAN: Absolutely.

PRESIDENT: (laughs).

HALDEMAN: No question.

PRESIDENT: Ya, ya, that's right . . . despite all the polls and all the rest, I think there's still a hell of a lot of people out there's still a hell of a lot of people out there, and from what I've seen, they're — you know, they, they want to believe, that's the point, isn't it?

HALDEMAN: Why sure, want to, and do.

PRESIDENT: Um hmm.

But-but you were there during that discussion. HALDEMAN: Yes.

PRESIDENT: And I suppose that we probably discussed how the hell we get the 120, right? I don't remember it.

HALDEMAN: No, no. I don't think so, I think it was, you know, just sort of a rehash of the other thing . . .

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: And basically going into the impossibility of doing it.

PRESIDENT: And the next day you, I suppose the question is, well, did you get the 120, I may have asked him that, I don't know. I don't thin I did but I . . . but I . . . (laughs).

HALDEMAN: I'm not even sure there was a second.

PRESIDENT: Well anyway —I—listen to it tomorrow an' lemme know. Will ya?

HALDEMAN: Yep.