For the Record

From Carl Stern's interview with John Ehrlichman on NBC's "Today Show":

Stern: What I don't understand is how someone of your intelligence—no one doubts that—and ability, how did you get in so much trouble? I mean you've got two convictions right now.

Ehrlichman: (Laughter.)

Stern: You came to Washington to serve your government, and you're in a lot of trouble now.

Ehrlichman: Okay, fair enough. I think—you know, hindsight is a marvelous thing. I think if I had had any understanding that everthing was a matter of record, that it was being taped, at appropriate times. instead of, as one does with a President of the United States, simply listening to his ruminations or discussions or alternative and so on. if I could have said, "Well, the moral imperative here, Mr. President, requires that you do this and not this." Instead of that, I think you get in the mode over a period of years, working for a President who is making all the decisions, bear in mind, of saying to yourself, "Well, it doesn't matter what he says in these casual conversations. You don't have to make a matter of record what your point of view is as long as down the line, before the ultimate action is taken, you can make your input and make sure that the wrong thing is not done."

Now, a prime example of that is the place in there in the tapes where he's saying to me, "Hey, offer these fellows clemency."

And I'm not saying, "Goodness gracious, as a matter of record, I want to say here for the microphone that I think that's a terrible idea."

Instead of that, I didn't say anything. Notice I didn't offer anybody clemency down the line as an ultimate proposition. And that's the way one gets to be—in the habit of working under these circumstances. You have to listen to these tapes in that setting.——