

Haldeman's Story Of the Nixon Tapes

Mission, Kan.

Richard M. Nixon considered destroying his White House tapes several times but did not do so because he wanted to keep an accurate historical record of his presidency, former Nixon chief of staff H.R. Haldeman says.

In the third of a five-part series of syndicated articles co-written by Haldeman and California columnist Joseph Scott, Haldeman said Mr. Nixon first raised the issue early in April, 1973, just before Haldeman and other high-ranking administration officials resigned.

He quoted Mr. Nixon as telling him, "Maybe we should destroy all the tapes, excluding only those covering national security matters."

"I argued against it," Haldeman wrote, "on the basis that the tapes would give the President accurate knowledge of what was actually said. Nixon's concern was based on a realization (which I did not have) of the distorted impression that would arise from certain tapes, especially when isolated from the over-all collection, if they should ever become public."

Haldeman said he was the only White House aide who knew of the tape system until it became public at the Senate Watergate hearings.

"When the existence of the tapes became public knowledge after I had left the White House, the question again arose in the Oval Office as to the advisability of destroying them," he said. "The general thesis was that the disclosure was bound to embarrass many public people, in this country and abroad, who had been secretly recorded."

Haldeman said he favored full release of the tapes requested by Watergate investigators.

"Even though there were some potentially damaging interpretations that could be made of some tapes, I felt that, taken as a whole, they would clear me, and Richard Nixon, because the tapes couldn't lie," he wrote. "In retrospect I know I was wrong."

He said that during the summer of 1973, after he quit the White House staff, former Treasury Secretary John Connally telephoned and suggested Mr. Nixon destroy the tapes.

"What he should do," Haldeman quoted Connally as saying, "is take all those tapes and have them piled in the center of the lawn in the rose garden, carefully guarded, of course. Then the President should soak them with gasoline, call the press corps out and throw a match to the pile, while explaining the validity of his act."

Haldeman said he had no communication with Mr. Nixon at the time and didn't pass the recommendation along to him.

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