

TRANSCRIPT OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE
PRESIDENT AND H.R. HALDEMAN IN THE OVAL
OFFICE ON APRIL 16, 1973 FROM 12:00 TO 12:31
PM

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PRESIDENT: Do you have any further thoughts on, uh,
how, we stage this damn thing in the first
stages?

HALDEMAN: Ron's got it all worked out. We've gone
over it

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: ...and then he's got the, the views of this
Advisory Group and, uh...

PRESIDENT: What does this amount to, Bob? What's his
suggestion? (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: Well, the problem is, you got to, you got
to...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) You can't help that.

HALDEMAN: When you have, you, you can't leave that out
because you get into the variables of what
you do if you do it, before Magruder's story
is out or after Magruder's story is out for
example. Uh, he, uh, he feels that, they'll
feel, I guess, that...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: That's right, you got to establish your
position and, and what you've done and that
the scenario will...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, but you don't do a backgrounder.

HALDEMAN: It works out pretty well on that. That
you've got Peterson running it, it-The ideal
time to do it is when you break the case. I
mean it's to-

HALDEMAN: get Petersen over here. You run your background, tell your story, and you know, so I got into this, and this is what I'm doing. Or Ziegler does or however you do it. I guess you will do it. And, uh, then you say it and this has led us, uh as uh, we fully suspected it would, to, uh, uh, the next major step that, that, uh, that Gerald, Mr.-Petersen here will, uh, describe which is, is the status of the case today. And then Petersen says, "We've, we've uh, as the President has reviewed these steps, and, uh, I can tell you today that we have broken the case and, uh, that Jeb Magruder, uh, one of the principal figures in this, has given us a full report on exactly what did transpire. It, uh, clearly establishes by his own testimony his own guilt as a high official of the Re-Election Committee...

PRESIDENT: Makes charges against others.

HALDEMAN: and provides charges against others which we are pursuing with the same diligence that we have, uh have up to now, and, uh, I will not discuss the others. I don't want to get into that and will report to you periodically whenever, whenever, as developments take place. But this is following up proper processes. We're not going to jeopardize the, this, he could make it, this, I am not going to may anything, and no, nothing should be said, that will jeopardize the rights of the defendants, but I also am not going to say anything...

PRESIDENT: but that's to prose--

HALDEMAN: ...that will jeopardize our prosecution because we are moving on people and we are going to get 'em.

(Pause)

HALDEMAN: Ron will mention to you that, and Steve chatted with me, Len Garment, as uh, you would expect, followed, uh, your orders to steep himself in the Watergate. He has steeped himself in the Watergate and he...

PRESIDENT: Must report.

HALDEMAN: ...has now said it is imperative that he meet with you for at least five minutes, preferably prior to two o'clock today, to report to you. And what he will say to you is that it is clear to him that you are in possession of knowledge that, uh, you cannot be in possession of without acting on. And that your action has to include cutting cleanly and that you've got to remove me, and probably Ehrlichman, although he has an interesting thesis, according to Ron, I have not talked to Len, which is at least worth considering, which is that, that I move ahead of the game for now, and put out my whole story, including the factual details without-

HALDEMAN: pulling any punches of my, you know, that \$350,000 fund.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: That yes, I sent it...

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: ...back to the Committee...

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: and, but I go into specifics. That I understand that Mr. Strachan delivered it to Mr. LaRue and that uh, that, uh, it way well, it was not done for that, my motive was not to provide funds for the defendants.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: My motive was to move these funds back where they belonged

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: But I, I have to agree that, that, uh, I fully recognized that, that LaRue's motive in accepting the money was, uh, as I had been told at least, a need for funds for the defendants, uh, to provide legal fees

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...and to provide support for their families, which I-and I acted at all times on the, uh, uh at the instigation of and through John Dean. In other words I was not, I didn't do any of this.

HALDEMAN: John Dean came to me and said "We need this," and I knew I wanted to get rid of money, and I said "this is the way to do it" and so on. And, uh, I must say that John Dean, the President's Counsel, through whom I was working and who was my only contact in this matter, at no time advised me that I was involved in doing anything that was illegal or improper, and I would assume and have, would act on the assumption that Dean got away with it.

PRESIDENT: I would...

HALDEMAN: Now look.

PRESIDENT: ...I wouldn't I don't want to get into the position of...

HALDEMAN: Hanging someone else?

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: Well, but he is going to have hung himself at that point in time.

PRESIDENT: Which the point is, the question is whether he, whether he should then, can get, get off, and get on other things. You know what I mean? I don't want him--he is in possession of knowledge about things that happened before this.

HALDEMAN: Okay.

PRESIDENT: But until this (unintelligible)...

HALDEMAN: Len makes a...

PRESIDENT: Security...

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HALDEMAN: Len makes a rather interesting case which is that we've got to look at this in terms of the President and the Presidency.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: Which is what we all say about it.

PRESIDENT: I'll see him about it.

HALDEMAN: That's what we all say.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: Uh, that, uh.

PRESIDENT: Does De-, Does he know what I have already done?

HALDEMAN: No, I don't know.

PRESIDENT: Petersen and all the rest?

HALDEMAN: I don't know. That's, Ehrlichman and, and Ziegler feel you shouldn't see him and that Ron should just assure him that you have all these facts and that you are moving and that what-he wants done is in the process of being done, uh...

PRESIDENT: Why don't you call him in and tell him and tell him that now--

HALDEMAN: Uh, I don't think I should but, John, uh

PRESIDENT: No.

HALDEMAN: I don't...

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PRESIDENT: I see your point, because he is asking for you to be fired.

HALDEMAN: Now his, the, well, he's asking, he's, he's suggesting a route.

PRESIDENT: That he, uh

HALDEMAN: He makes the case that it's a better route for me, in the long haul, and it's a better route for the Presidency.

PRESIDENT: But you'd be the first one to go out?

HALDEMAN: Yeah. And, Id go out and I resign and I resign and tell my story...

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: ...publicly.

PRESIDENT: Uh huh, right.

HALDEMAN: Not to the press, I mean, not to the jury.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: Do it publicly.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: In some fashion, and,-th, uh I tell the whole story, all the details. And I say it is, I am absolutely clear in my own mind that I have done nothing legally or morally wrong but that'll be up to the Grand Jury to determine uh, uh. As...

PRESIDENT: When's his ar--

HALDEMAN: Then his argument is that I am in a position that, that, uh, he thinks that I can bring something like-that off. He feels that Ehrlichman should not try to do it 'cause he doesn't think he can bring it off, and he thinks, therefore, you've got to, got to put up a, up and try to hold Ehrlichman in, if you get a problem then you just got to let him go. But at that point you're uh, it is a pretty rough spot...

PRESIDENT: You mean Ehrlich-Yeah, we just won't know what the situation is on Ehrlichman, on whether...

HALDEMAN: No. And there are other, there are more potentials there than there are on mine. Mine I think we have all out, I think we know them all and, uh...

PRESIDENT: Ehrlichman's we just don't know, there may be more potentials. I think this, uh, is, uh, 'cause I think Dean is more on, uh, frankly giving Ehrlichman a screwing more than anybody else. I have that feeling, uh, he's got...

HALDEMAN: Well, and if Col-

PRESIDENT: He's got to get...

HALDEMAN: ...if Colson gets hung up anywhere, he'll go...

PRESIDENT: Correct.

HALDEMAN: ...on Ehrlichman and not on me. He can't get me, I didn't work with him on any of that stuff. John did.

PRESIDENT: Well, what would this be, Bob? This would be before I said anything?

HALDEMAN: I don't think so, uh, I, I, should, I don't know. This, Ron just raised just this last minute. He wasn't even gonna raise it, then, then, then he said, "Well, you might as well know what, how Len spins it out." Uh...

PRESIDENT: What the hell information has Len got that I don't, uh...

HALDEMAN: None.

PRESIDENT: I mean, uh...

HALDEMAN: None.

PRESIDENT: Uh, is he just basing this on minutiae, this, that or the other thing?

HALDEMAN: He doesn't have anything you don't have.

PRESIDENT: Just tell him...

HALDEMAN: All he has, he does, he, he says--I, I, that it isn't a question of the legal thing. And he said, "I think..."

PRESIDENT: Fairness.

HALDEMAN: quite likely that Bob could get through the whole legal thing," but then look at it dawn the road, you, you got to go through all these trials and everything. They, are going to get back into it again there--

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: They are going to get into the money and where the money went. If we haven't told them ahead of time, they are going to drag it out...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: ...of us drop by drop.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: And, uh, I can see it's a weak appearing case in terms of, uh, you know...

PRESIDENT: Um, huh.

HALDEMAN: ...whether I think I was giving the money back to them or, where did the money go? Now I, I, there's no question about that. I, I knew where the money was gonna go, some of it. I don't think all of it did.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: But I knew where some A it was gonna go and, uh, but you, you...

PRESIDENT: But you've got to concede...

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible) what in the hell...

PRESIDENT: Again when LaRue testifies as to what the, uh, money was for~ was it to shut them up, or was it their purpose to provide help for them, now...

HALDEMAN: See, that's the other point. In my viewpoint it wasn't to shut them up, it's that, but that...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: ...is a hard case, for anybody to believe, I suppose.

PRESIDENT: Well, that's what you're gonna say to them about it,

HALDEMAN: Well, absolutely.

PRESIDENT: I see.

HALDEMAN: But, but that, uh, so they can't make the legal case, so, so, uh,

PRESIDENT: Ron's said that on purpose, on--does Ron like this scenario of your going out?

HALDEMAN: No. No. He is opposed to it. He thinks it's, it's wrong, but he says you know I'm biased so, uh, that's that's a judgment call that I probably shouldn't even try to make. But he said I'm right. (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: Rogers, Rogers, uh, I'll, I will see him this afternoon.

HALDEMAN: I haven't raised that with Rogers.

PRESIDENT: Rogers

HALDEMAN: All I said to Rogers...

PRESIDENT: ...has not said that either you or Ehrlichman should leave, has he?

HALDEMAN: But he doesn't know the facts.

PRESIDENT: Well--(pause) could you, you know really, so that...

HALDEMAN: Want me to meet with him and fill, and try to fill in the facts?

PRESIDENT: I really do, you, as to what the points of vulnerability are, and you can do it just cold turkey. Say I just wanted him to know this cause I haven't made notes (unintelligible) I have just made a few. And I won't, I want him to know the cold turkey--and I say that is what I want to talk to him about. Could you do that? And point out it's my view, I feel this, this is uh, legal. I mean it's a God damned arguable case, but it's just the fact you get splashed. Would you mind doing that?

HALDEMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Have him come over, too. I should say about 3:30.

HALDEMAN: 3:30.

PRESIDENT: and I will see him at 4:00. That would be very helpful if you would fill him in on this level, I...

PRESIDENT: The, um, I could just say, so that Len doesn't think that I, the, uh...

HALDEMAN: You don't want him to...

PRESIDENT: I just don't want him to come and tell me the obvious. That's the point. Could Ehrlichman just let Len know that the events have overtaken or is that dangerous? No, we better tell him.

HALDEMAN: But he knows pretty much, I think.

PRESIDENT: He knows about Magruder and all the rest?

HALDEMAN: I don't know that he knows it in specific terms. I think he knows about, yeah, he has come up with the same information that, that John did and anybody would--looking into the picture.

(Pause)

PRESIDENT: Well, the, I've, I, I think I could (unintelligible) everything that Len's telling me

HALDEMAN: Oh, yeah.

PRESIDENT: It's the idea, hell, we talked about this a week ago.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: You know where to protect-

HALDEMAN: Yeah, talked about it for a long time.

PRESIDENT: How you handle it.

HALDEMAN: Going back to San Clemente I made the pitch for my going out ahead.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: But, but not going into as much detail. There, if I, if I do it now with what they've got, I if I do anything I've got, I've got to do everything. I think, that's Ron's point and I think he's right on that.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. What does Ron think you ought to do, did he say, leaving out the PR. Does he think we should try to tell the truth? I, I am-gonna ask Rogers that, frankly.

HALDEMAN: I'm not sure. I don't know.

PRESIDENT: Believe me, I think, I think Ron would say...

HALDEMAN: Whatever you think he does, I think he'll say just wait and see.

PRESIDENT: Wait and see, huh?

HALDEMAN: See his point is, there's no question that I will be tarnished.

PRESIDENT: That's right. The question is whether your useability, basically...

HALDEMAN: And you have to evaluate that at, at that point...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: ...and it seems to me at that point you have the option of my saying to you that I have concluded and now, I'll say that now and that I haven't, but I, I will sure say it--that I concluded that, that, uh, I'm, I am tarnished to the point where I, I can't be useful.

PRESIDENT: Right. Your right, your usefulness has been impaired and, therefore, you can't be useful anymore, right, that's the way you put it.

HALDEMAN: Sure. Then I go out and Garment's statement is that then I go out and, and, uh, and hit some of this, use the position that I have established that way from the outside to, uh...

PRESIDENT: To fight?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, somehow or other. I don't exactly know how. I think he spells that out but Ron didn't get into it yet. And a...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) Who, who was it that says, who, who Len, John Ehrlichman on the--I think I should see Ron.

HALDEMAN: No. Ron and John Ehrlichman talked about that.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: I was up so late last night.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

PRESIDENT: Ron and John Ehrlichman do not think I should bother seeing--On what grounds?

HALDEMAN: Ron felt you had to see him jus for internal, but you know that's so...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...concerned about things that, that you almost have to see him just to keep ah...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, why don't I see him after I see Rogers? How would that be?

HALDEMAN: You could do that.

PRESIDENT: In other words I'll, I'll have a plan in mind. I'm gonna get some thoughts in my mind. I am not gonna trouble.

HALDEMAN: See, Ziegler's been, apparently Ziegler's been meeting with this group of men, Chappie Rose and Moore and they have been running on a different strain.

PRESIDENT: Could you ask Ziegler to have Len put it on a piece of paper before I meet him?

HALDEMAN: Sure, I'll ask him.

PRESIDENT: That would be helpful.

HALDEMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Tell him I need it before, uh, tell him I am meeting with Rogers at 4 o'clock and would just like his recommendation on a piece of paper before that. Then I'll see matters better. How does that sound to you?

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PRESIDENT: Let me say that I think we can move the Rogers thing up or down.

HALDEMAN: Can you move him up to three?

PRESIDENT: Well, wait a minute. One-thirty p.m. I've got to get some rest this afternoon.

HALDEMAN: Yeah. Still leave by four--get ready (unintelligible). You may know something by then.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: Good.

PRESIDENT: Have you filled Henry in, Bob?

HALDEMAN: Nope.

PRESIDENT: You haven't? Well, he's got enough problems in Laos.

HALDEMAN: I haven't. But somebody else may. He seems to, he seems to be on his own. Well, Garment took it upon himself to go meet with Henry and to meet with Al Haig, uh, to discuss his concern about the whole situation, apparently.

PRESIDENT: Well, what the hell did he do that for?

HALDEMAN: On the basis that, he, he thought there was a real danger and threat to the Presidency and that, that, and, uh...

PRESIDENT: Maybe I don't want a memo from him first. What do you think? Maybe he just better do it orally.

HALDEMAN: Well, John felt he should have written to you. That that is what he should have done at the beginning. That, uh, maybe you have a problem with that. That means the secretaries got to write it up.

PRESIDENT: Yep, yep. Well just say that, uh, tell him that I am meeting with Rogers this afternoon. Now, I, I think somebody should say that. Who has he put the request through to, John or through you, or, uh...

HALDEMAN: He just sent it up through Steve Bull. He, Ron knew he was. He is working with Ron now, rather than John.

PRESIDENT: Hmph, okay.

(Pause)

HALDEMAN: I just, you know, it is, uh, impossible, That is why I hope Rogers can stay cool and sort of above it. It is impossible for any of us--

PRESIDENT: All the concerned people.

HALDEMAN: If we get a, uh, a feel. I just have a, a, a horrible feeling that we may...

PRESIDENT: Reacting like Dean?

HALDEMAN: Just, yeah. That, that, we are just way overdramatizing it, you know. I...

PRESIDENT: That's my view.

HALDEMAN: Think, that you know, that's, that's...

PRESIDENT: That's what I want to believe.

HALDEMAN: Well, that is what I was gonna say, that's self-serving too, so it's, uh...

PRESIDENT: Well, you, you can, as you know, of course, uh, that, that would be the tendency. That is the trouble with Garment. I wanted him to get into this on the legal side. I didn't mean anything and I, I, I must say I really didn't get acquainted with the case, but, I meant I really didn't get acquainted with the problems for the day, period, and all that, because Len, Bob., always reacts to things. Am I, an I right that we have got to do something to...

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: ...restore the credibility of the Presidency.

HALDEMAN: Yeah, of course, you know the credibility gap in the old days. Ah...

PRESIDENT: Well, there's: there's going to be...

HALDEMAN: Len hit the panic button, tell 'um.

PRESIDENT: Uh, yeah, that's...

HALDEMAN: If we reacted in Garment's way in other things, we wouldn't be where we are.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: That doesn't mean he isn't right this time, incidentally.

PRESIDENT: I know. It would be very helpful to me if you could see Rogers over at, uh. I would get him at 3 o'clock, give him an hour on the whole God damned thing. I wonder if you and John shouldn't see him together? Would that be alright?

HALDEMAN: I'd like to...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...if, if that's okay with Bill.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Will you ask him?

HALDEMAN: I'll ask him.

PRESIDENT: Say because, uh, so you...

HALDEMAN: ...to give him a full run before he meets with you.

PRESIDENT: Obviously because, he is, he has made a study that, uh, and we want him to come in. And tell (unintelligible) very glad if he could meet with just you or meet with two, I prefer he meet with the two of you and then he meets, uh, in my office around 4 o'clock.

HALDEMAN: Ehrlichman makes a strong case that on this my making a statement and my making a statement or anything, that as of now that my potential...

PRESIDENT: Guilt?

HALDEMAN: Uh, well, not guilt...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: But that I should not do anything until--without my lawyers.

PRESIDENT: That's my (unintelligible). I think, I don't think you should say a thing.

HALDEMAN: And that, uh, I'm afraid my lawyers are going to tell me for Christ's sake (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I think the time, the time has outrun that because Petersen has told me that you and Ehrlichman are going to be called to the Grand Jury soon. He has told me that. Under the circumstances, I could not advise you with, with my, uh, limited knowledge of the law. I could not advise anybody to make a statement. You know what I mean?

HALDEMAN: Check.

PRESIDENT: Because, basically, when you get in there they are going to question you on your damn statement.

HALDEMAN: Of course, for my dough, that's alright.

PRESIDENT: I know.

HALDEMAN: I really, I, whatever I say in the statement is exactly what I say in the Grand Jury. So, uh...

PRESIDENT: I know.

HALDEMAN: But, nevertheless.

PRESIDENT: I wouldn't give them that opportunity, I'd, uh, keep that.

HALDEMAN: I think Len's view is that what you need is a bold move, you know, a really, some kind of a dramatic move. Henry feels that, but Henry feels that you ought to, you should go on television.

PRESIDENT: I know

HALDEMAN: He still thinks that...

PRESIDENT: 9:00 o'clock.

HALDEMAN: ...which is his solution to any problem, and...

PRESIDENT: Do you believe I should do the 9:00 o'clock?

HALDEMAN: No, sir. On this?

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: I don't either.

HALDEMAN: We are all steeped in this, but look at the newspaper. Where is the Watergate today?

PRESIDENT: Well in the country, it is not that big. It, it is just a little bit in the evening news and it should be handled as a news story. I, I am not going to go on and say "Look, we, we in a hell of a shape." It will be a big story, Bob, for a couple or three weeks. Let's face it...

HALDEMAN: Yep, that's right.

PRESIDENT: But it is not going to be it, and it won't, won't, uh, have one hell of a time, and uh.
(Unintelligible with noise)