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Oral History Interview  
With  
CHARLES W. COLSON  
On  
September 21, 1988



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff  
National Archives and Records Administration

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National Archives and Records Administration  
Nixon Presidential Materials Staff

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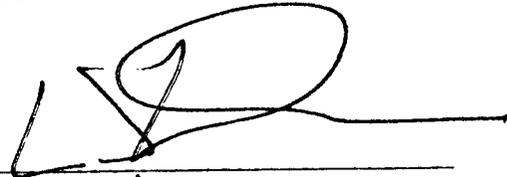
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**DOCUMENT WITHDRAWAL RECORD [NIXON PROJECT]**

DOCUMENT NUMBER	DOCUMENT TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE OR CORRESPONDENTS	DATE	RESTRICTION
1	Trans.	p. 5-6, from last open "...it reads" to first open "CWC: [Laughter]"	9/21/88	C
2	Trans.	p. 6, from last open "FJG:" to "CWC: Yeah"	9/21/88	C
3	Trans.	p. 22, from last open "Statistics. " to first open "CWC: That didn't..."	9/21/88	C
4	Trans.	p. 22-23, from last open "FJG:" to "It's carbon copy..."	9/21/88	C
5	Trans.	p. 32, from last open "Haldeman." to first open "Do you..."	9/21/88	C
6	Trans.	p.33, from last open "...at them." to first open "I know..."	9/21/88	C
7	Trans.	p. 33, from last open "...by Haldeman" to first open "That's Haldeman..."	9/21/88	C
8	Trans.	p. 34, from last open "July 5, 1972." to first open "That's your..."	9/21/88	C
9	Trans.	p. 35, from last open "...our office." to first open "This would..."	9/21/88	C
10	Trans.	p. 35, from last open "PAS:" to first open "CWC: Oh dear me..."	9/21/88	C
11	Trans.	p. 37-38, from last open "It says,..." to first open "CWC: We did..."	9/21/88	C

FILE GROUP TITLE

Nixon Project Oral Histories

BOX NUMBER

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FOLDER TITLE

Oral History with Charles W. Colson, 9/21/88

RESTRICTION CODES

- A. Release would violate a Federal statute or Agency Policy.
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- C. Pending or approved claim that release would violate an individual's rights
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- H. Withdrawn and returned non-historical material.

Oral history interview with Charles W. Colson  
conducted by Frederick J. Graboske and Paul A. Schmidt  
at Mr. Colson's office in Reston, Virginia  
on September 21, 1988

CWC: I thought a good place, the only place, that I thought I would volunteer anything that might be useful to the history of the era, was all of the fracas that came out in the newspapers in the last couple of weeks about Nixon's anti-Semitism, and [Frederic V.] Malek, and the "Jewish cabal" at the Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS]. So let me contribute what I know.

I was not part of, at least that I can recall, any of the memo traffic that we read about in the Washington Post, of Nixon wanting to find out the number of Jews in the Bureau of Labor Statistics. I was, however, party to conversations, periodically, with Nixon, in which he would talk about Jewish liberals, who were old-line carryovers from the New Deal days, in the administration, who he felt were sabotaging his programs. He would use terms like the "liberal Jews in the administration", or the "Jewish Democrats", but I never took it as an anti-Semitic reference. Rather, those two words were kind of synonymous with a class of people who came into the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, highly motivated, idealistic liberals, and were still in the government, and were opposed to most of the things Mr. Nixon was for. I think if fifty thousand Arabs had graduated from Yale, Princeton and Harvard in the thirties, and had all moved into the Roosevelt administration, you'd be talking about those "Arab Democrats".

It was more identification than it was anti-Semitism. There were times when he would get really riled up at Jews in the media and in government, but again there wasn't any--I suppose just the use of the term connotes a certain amount of anti-Semitism, certainly an insensitivity, but I never took it, at least, as anti-Semitic. Because I always knew what Nixon's stand was on Israel, which is a very strong stand. I knew his relationship with Henry Kissinger, and the evidence is, that he made Kissinger Secretary of State, the first Jew to be made Secretary of State. I think it was more that they were Democrats. I think if they had been Republicans, he would have meant it in a complimentary way. I think it was derogatory only because ideologically and politically, they were people [who] he felt were out to get him. I remember discussions about the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only in that, Nixon a couple of times told me (and it's on tapes which Fred Graboske probably listened to) about the liberal Democrats. "We've got the evidence on the liberal Democrats in the Bureau of Labor Statistics."

I recall one instance: there was one briefing of the press by BLS that directly contradicted a White House briefing of the press. It was in the Spring of 1971 and I distinctly remember it sending Nixon into a rage. I was not part of the process by which these people were identified. I knew nothing about two of them being reassigned. However, there was an episode in July of 1971, when the statistics came out for June (so it would have been early July) and showed a precipitous increase, even seasonally adjusted, in the unemployment rate. Nixon hit the

roof on Friday night, the day the statistics were published, and called me and said he wanted me to get Jim [James D.] Hodgson in the office the next morning and fire him. Maybe you've heard this on tape--they were very frantic calls. He would call and he would call back five minutes later, and want to know if I'd fired Hodgson yet. It was one of these bizarre things.

There were cases like that when I thought my job was kind of to humour Nixon, and keep him from blowing his stack, blowing a gasket. He was in a temper tantrum. Like anybody else, he's got a temper, and he would lose it once in awhile. I tried very hard to keep him from losing it altogether. What I did, was to call George Shultz; I don't know, but you probably know from the tapes whether the President asked me to call George or not.

FJG: I don't remember.

CWC: But I did call George. I got George on the phone, who was up at his place in the Berkshires, vacationing. I think it must have been the Fourth of July weekend. [I] told George what was going on, because I knew that Hodgson was a friend of George, a protege of Shultz, and I thought Shultz ought to get in and try to save Hodgson, because otherwise Hodgson, the next day, was going to be summarily dismissed by the President of the United States, who never liked to fire anybody, ever. Never liked to confront anyone, wouldn't fire a secretary. He would always have somebody else do it. Anyway, we had about ten phone calls one night, in which he told me to fire him, and at that point, vented his wrath at the Jewish cabal of liberal Democrats in the BLS, who he knew were undermining his presidency. Hodgson hadn't cleaned it up

and taken care of it, and Hodgson had to go, and this was the last straw. I got Shultz, Shultz got on a military plane that was sent out of Andrews [Air Force Base], and flew him back. Shultz and Hodgson went in and met with the President the next morning, calmed him down, Hodgson kept his job, and I got out of the middle. That's the extent of my knowledge of it. I thought, since my name came into that story in that paper, in the Post, I thought I'd remember as much as I could.

FJG: So, you didn't know anything about the President's instructions to Malek, to do what was called a "demographic analysis".

CWC: No, except I knew there was one done, because the President told me there was one. I never saw it. I don't know anything about his instructions. It doesn't surprise me, it sounds just like him. Nothing in the story surprised me, in the Post.

FJG: You didn't find it odd at times, that he would rant about Jews, as he would from time to time, and as you've pointed out he did have his national security advisor a Jew.

CWC: Oh, yeah.

FJG: The chief of the Council of Economic Advisors was a Jew.

CWC: Herb [Herbert G.] Stein....

FJG: Arthur Burns....

CWC: Arthur Burns, whom he had great affection for, Len [Leonard] Garment, who was there from his old law firm, who he really liked and had close feelings for. No, I don't think.... There were times when he would kid about being anti-Semitic, he would joke about it, but it was always in sort of a jocular fashion. I never felt that he had real anti-Semitic feelings. His hostility

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towards Jews [was] because the Jews were against him, not because they were Jews. It had nothing to do with their ethnic identity, or racial heritage or identity. It had to do with the fact that they were opposing him and were generally liberals, and many of them in the media, and many of them sort of his natural enemies.

I remember when I came back from Israel, he said to me on the phone one night, "Well, what did you think of Israel?" I told him that I was really impressed with the Israelis. He said, "You mean, you're not anti-Semitic anymore? Ha-ha." Well, probably if somebody listened to that on tape, [they'd] say, "Ah, so they really were anti-Semitic". Or I would hear him rave about Kissinger's Jewish friends in the media, how Henry was always sucking up to his Jewish friends in the media. I guess, it's a matter of interpretation. At the time, I did not put any real stock in it. I think, if you look at it now, in hindsight, Malek looks terrible, in the public's eye, but at the time it was more directed at people who came out of a generation, in the thirties, of graduates of eastern liberal schools who were the ideologues of the New Deal. Nixon felt they were carrying over and undermining his business.

FJG: I have here a document that relates to what you've been talking about. It's a memorandum to [Dwight L.] Chapin from [H.R. ("Bob")] Haldeman, xeroxed to you for your information, dated July 13, 1970, and it reads:

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CWC: [Laughter]

FJG:

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CWC: Yeah. Mainly because that was the political strategy.

FJG: Right.

CWC: We were not trying to win the Jewish votes, or the black vote, we were trying to win what I wrote about in memoranda, starting in 1970, early 1970, was the "Silent Majority", the white ethnic, Catholic voter, blue collar, Middle America, [Richard M.] Scammon and [Benjamin J.] Wattenberg-type individuals. So, again, that isn't because we didn't want Jews in the Oval Office, it's because we weren't cultivating the Jewish vote as a racial block, or ethnic block, we were cultivating the people who were resentful in the inner cities.

I remember once, when Pat [Patrick J.] Buchanan came to Nixon and said, there were orthodox Jewish communities in New York that were aroused over busing. Nixon said, "Let's get those people in here and talk to them." So, it wasn't a religious or

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ethnic thing, it was a political thing. That memo that you're talking about is one that would have come to me, because I'd written a lot of memos advocating that, but advocating it because of the politics, and because of the general political strategy of the administration.

PAS: There was a memo, that Fred took a note on, I believe that.... It's dated July 28, 1971, you were writing to Haldeman, that "Garment is convinced I am anti-Semitic, and anti-arts (both true)". That's a joke?

CWC: I did that all the time, I did that repeatedly. That's how that "grandmother memo" got all that publicity. I said, "The press have all been saying I'd be willing to run over my own grandmother. If you don't shape up, I'm going to prove UPI [United Press International] is right." I would do that all the time. What did it say, anti-Semitic and what?

PAS: Anti-arts. Because it's Garment.

FJG: Did you find that there was a certain stuffiness in the White House?

CWC: Terrible, and I have always enjoyed irreverence at times like that. It brings out all my irreverent instincts. Buchanan and I used to do that a lot. I still do it. I guess it will continue to get me in trouble. I do it with pompous religious people now. I used to do it with pompous political people.

FJG: Well, why don't you go to Mr. [James] Neff's questions?

PAS: All right.

CWC: I think one thing I should point out is that I was responsible for bringing outside groups in for Nixon to meet. One of the

people I brought in was Sol Linowitz. That's because Linowitz was sounding like he was interested in some of our positions, foreign policy-wise, and I thought he would be a good man for Nixon to spend some time with. I thought he had something interesting to say, so, again, it wasn't anti-Semitic, so much as it was--I don't think it was really anti-Semitic, I think it was where the politics were.

FJG: Let me just ask you one more question about that, which is Fred Malek's role in the White House. Is Malek really the hatchet man as created in the press?

CWC: Well, yes and no. Malek was a young, ex-West Point, Green Beret, Army, do-it-by-the-book kind of a guy. He was given a job to do, and it was sort of like, "Yes sir", click the heels, and off he'd go. He was very efficient. He believed in all the advanced management techniques; he'd been to Harvard Business School. He was very unpolitical, he was very naive politically. I used to quarrel with Fred, because I felt he didn't apply political judgment on things. When he was staffing the second administration I used to battle him head on when he would....

FJG: We talked about that last time.

CWC: We did talk about it? With [Claude S.] Brinegar's appointment?

FJG: Right. "Who is Claude Brinegar?" And it turned out he wasn't the catholic you all thought he was [laughter].

CWC: It was typical of Malek to do things--sort of the efficiency expert model role. So, if Nixon said, "Go on over to the Interior Department and fire Wally [Walter J.] Hickel and his whole staff," he'd be, "Yes sir," you know, the crewcut, buttoned

down obedient aide. Well, he'd overdo it. He would compile a list of Jews in the BLS without thinking a thing of it, because that's what the President ordered him to do. I don't think he saw any moral question about it at the time, nor did I. I saw a political question. If you look at it now, fifteen years later, in the light of how those memos sound taken today, and they sound terrible, embarrassing. But they didn't seem that way at the time. Malek was not a policy-maker.

FJG: Although he later came to have a high position at OMB [Office of Management and Budget].

CWC: Because that was part of the new look of the second administration, where you would have a bunch of automatons running the government through the two super-Aides setup in the White House (Haldeman and [John D.] Ehrlichman). So, they wanted guys like Malek, who would do what they were told. I should add, for the sake of history, that Malek was a very able, sharp, keen guy, and a very nice guy. I really liked Fred Malek. I bickered with him a lot on politics, on what I just considered his lack of political sophistication.

PAS: O.K. These questions all deal with labor relations, and the teamsters, actually the Teamsters Union. I don't know a lot of background on these. These are Mr. Neff's questions. Number one: Restrictions were placed on James Hoffa's December 1971 presidential commutation. He was not to be involved in union activities until 1980. The question is, did you suggest placing the restrictions on Hoffa?

CWC: No. I did not suggest placing restrictions on Hoffa. The first

time I knew that restrictions were being placed on Hoffa, was when Nixon called me in one night and said, "I'm going to pardon --I'm going to commute Jimmy Hoffa's sentence for Christmas". This was maybe two weeks before Christmas. "If you want to let Frank Fitzsimmons know ahead of time, and get a little credit, go ahead and do so. But I'm also, at the same time, going to restrict his ever being able to go back into a labor union. I think he's served his time, I think he ought to be out of prison. That way, at least, we won't run into the opposition of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations], and others that we're letting a crook back in to run the labor movement". My answer to Nixon, which is on tape, I assume, (maybe Fred's heard it) was, "I think that is a Solomonesque solution".

FJG: I don't recall that particular conversation.

CWC: I think it's an ingenious solution, because what you have done is to let Hoffa out--and he should be out, and there was a lot of agitation to get him out--but you're keeping him out of the Teamsters, because he doesn't belong back in running the Teamsters. Plus, I was personally glad, because we had developed relationships with Fitzsimmons, that I knew were going to result in the Teamsters endorsing us in the next election. But there were allegations made that I put that on, and that it was part of a bargain, and the Teamsters later retained my law firm, and it was all part of a deal--Fitzsimmons traded support for Nixon for keeping Hoffa out of the union. It's all fantasy.

The idea of the restrictions came from John Mitchell, and

all of this has been testified to under oath, so the historian asking this question is shortcutting a whole lot of research he ought to be doing into the affidavits that were presented at the time by the Special Prosecutor. Also, this was clear in some civil litigation that followed. People have testified to this under oath. John Dean testified that he was instructed by John Mitchell to write up those conditions, that the idea came from Mitchell, that he never discussed it with me. The tapes, which the Special Prosecutor listened to, satisfied them that I had not known about it in advance, nor had I proposed it; John Dean testified that I hadn't proposed it. George Shultz played golf with George Meany and discussed it with Meany, and got Meany's approval before it was done, so that Meany went along with it. I talked to Fitzsimmons and told him. Everybody at the time thought it was a wonderful solution, commuting the guy's sentence, without letting him back in to raid the Teamsters Union. Now, people continue to try to make conspiratorial theories out of it. If they just look at the evidence, they will see that that doesn't work. What I've just said would probably not prevent a historian or someone else from writing it, because it sounds better the conspiratorial way. It's just that that's not the way the facts are.

PAS: So Fitzsimmons agreed that this was fine?

CWC: He thought it was a great solution.

PAS: He did, O.K. It was not a question of why not just let Hoffa stay in jail if Fitzsimmons didn't want him around?

CWC: Because there was tremendous pressure from within the Teamsters

movement to release him from jail. There were arguments that were pretty good, made at the time, that he had been the butt of a political persecution/prosecution. I don't think Jimmy Hoffa deserves any rewards, he was no angel. He was undoubtedly properly convicted, but he was sure the subject of a crusade that convicted him. He had been up for parole three times, I think, or two times, and been denied. There was a good argument to commute his sentence, on its merits.

PAS: According to a Teamsters book, Hoffa Wars is the name of the book, you requested cash from Teamsters Vice President Anthony Provenzano, for the White House. The money was in exchange for the Nixon administration's cooperation in keeping Jimmy Hoffa out of the labor movement with the commutation restriction, Time magazine reported.

CWC: The man that reported that in Time magazine, Sandy Smith, was the same man who's just been discovered--Time magazine has just had to pay out several hundred thousand dollars on a libel suit on very similar charges. I talked to Sandy Smith about that. He would not tell me his source, I don't know where it came from, but it is absolutely untrue. I never had any contact with Tony Provenzano, never talked to him in my life, don't know him, never asked for any money from him and wouldn't have under any circumstances. That was simply part of this bizarre conspiratorial theory that people continue to perpetrate. I knew Sam Provenzano because he was a Vice President of the Teamsters, but I never met Tony, nor did I request any money from any Teamster at any time ever.

PAS: O.K. I won't ask the follow-up questions then. The next question is about the Pressers. Bill [William] Presser, head of the Ohio Teamsters, and father of Jackie Presser, was being investigated by the Justice Department in 1970 for possible criminal wrongdoings. Fitzsimmons mentioned Presser's plight to you on April 29, 1971, according to a White House memo. Did you ever meet with Bill or Jackie Presser?

CWC: Not then. I met with them later, when I was representing the Teamsters, and I met both of them at a Teamsters council meeting in 1972, when the Teamsters endorsed Nixon, but not at that time, no.

PAS: Did you plead Presser's case with the Justice Department?

CWC: No, because anytime I received any kind of inquiry like that, I sent it to John Dean. I had no direct contact with the Justice Department.

PAS: What did Presser offer to do in return?

CWC: Nothing that I know of.

PAS: Political support? Campaign contributions? Presidential endorsement in 1972?

CWC: None that I know of.

PAS: O.K. That's that question. Your notes of a July 17, 1972 presidential meeting with the Teamsters, had Duke Hoover's business card stapled to it. Hoover was a partner with Harry Haler, in Hoover-Gorin Associates, a Las Vegas public relations firm that was hired to do work for the Teamsters Union. The question is, did you meet Hoover?

CWC: July 17th?

PAS: 1972.

CWC: No, I'm going to have to guess here, that that was the occasion in San Clemente when the Teamsters endorsed Nixon. I don't know how to double check that, but if that was the occasion when the Teamsters endorsed Nixon it makes sense. But I don't know why Hoover's card would be attached to that. Unless he was with the Teamsters out at La Costa when they met and endorsed Nixon, he might have given me his card. I think that date would have to be when the Teamsters endorsed Nixon. What's the identification on the meeting?

PAS: Presidential meeting with the Teamsters.

CWC: Yeah, that would have to be in San Clemente at the time of the endorsement. It must have been because he was their PR [public relations] counsel, that he was there at the meeting and gave me his card. Maybe he was arranging the logistics, he was their PR guy. Maybe he was arranging the logistics of bringing them up, because once they voted at La Costa to endorse Nixon, I called them and invited them to come up to a reception at the President's house in San Clemente. I was there. We had a reception that next afternoon; Hoover probably arranged that. I later met with Hoover, after I was out of the White House and was counsel to the Teamsters. I think it would probably violate the attorney/client relationship for me to discuss all that went on except, I don't think it would to say that I was responsible for the termination of Hoover's contract. I did not think the Teamsters were getting adequate representation. My doing so created some controversy within the Teamsters Union, but there

are memorandum reflecting my opinion that that contract should be terminated.

PAS: Mr. Neff also asks, did the Nixon reelection campaign accept contributions from Hoover-Gorin or Jackie Presser?

CWC: I haven't any idea. None of them were handled through my office. I didn't handle contributions. There were two or three times when Fitzsimmons called and said he had some contributions he wanted to make, and I said, "Well, get them over to the Committee on the Reelection of the President [ie. Committee to Reelect the President]. I don't want them in my office." He wanted to bring them by the office, and I said no.

PAS: I'm going to have to show you this next one, it refers to your notes. This is in your files. For the tape recorder, it says that, "Problems with Fitzsimmons, [Harold J.] Gibbons,...."

CWC: Oh, this would have been from my secretary to me.

PAS: O.K.

CWC: "Problems with Fitzsimmons, Gibbons, Presser, Provenzano and [Roy] Williams. He still needs to talk to you." I don't know who the "he" is.

PAS: Do you know what the problems were?

CWC: You see, "Meeting with the President of the Teamsters at San Clemente, 7/17/72".

PAS: That was the folder it was in.

CWC: So, I was right. That would make sense, that Hoover's card would be attached to that, because he was their PR guy, running their public activities out there, and talking to the press. So, he handled the press conference when the Teamsters announced their

support for Nixon. That now is coming back to me. That's why I would have had his card with me. This would be something--my secretary used to type up stuff, memos for me, and stuff on my desk; this obviously got off the list. I don't know who "he" is.

PAS: Hm hmm. It was unclear who the note was from.

CWC: Well, it was from Joan Hall, my secretary. I can't say that for sure, but that's the kind of notes she used to give me.

"Problems with Fitzsimmons, Gibbons, Presser"--Gibbons was anti-Nixon; he was the anti-Nixon vote--"Provenzano and Williams". My guess is--I can only guess that. Within the Teamsters executive council, there [were] about five people who did not want to endorse Nixon. Gibbons definitely didn't, because Gibbons was for [George S.] McGovern. Two or three others didn't--for very complicated reasons, some because they didn't think that the Teamsters should break with what the AFL-CIO was going to do, which was neutrality. Fitzsimmons could have called me saying he was having trouble getting those people to support Nixon.

Gibbons, it would make sense; Provenzano it wouldn't (that's not Tony, that's not--that's Sam, who was a Vice President);

Williams, who would have been for him; Presser, I have no idea.

It could have been somebody on my staff, who had been talking to these people. I don't know. I can't help you. I don't know who the "he" is.

PAS: All right, next question. Harry Haler said, in a deposition, that you knew about money coming to him from the Hoover-Gorin public relations contract with the Teamsters, and that you told the Pressers to stop giving him money. Why did you want payments

stopped to him?

CWC: I don't know what you are talking about. Harry Haler, who's that?

PAS: I don't know. Oh, he was also in Hoover-Gorin.

CWC: And he testified what?

PAS: He testified in a deposition that you knew about money coming to him from the Hoover-Gorin public relations contract with the Teamsters, and that you told the Pressers to stop giving him money. I've got part of the deposition here. I don't know that it....

CWC: I would have to know the date of it.

PAS: The deposition was set in 1977, but I don't know when he's referring to.

CWC: Well, the only thing this could be.... I have no idea. Looking at this without a date or identification on it makes my answer nothing more than a guess. There is a reference here (on the deposition), "Did Duke tell you in April of '74 that things were changing?" It was in the Winter of '74 that I was responsible for the Duke Hoover public relations contract being cancelled with the Teamsters. This says "Colson had told Duke: 'We don't --don't give Harry twenty-five thousand dollars anymore' and Jackie was cut off". Jackie Presser, I assume. I believed that the money was not all going for public relations, which is why I had the contract cancelled. That's probably what that's referring to, but I can only guess, because I don't know what this page is.

PAS: Hm hmm. It sounds like he's just guessing too.

CWC: I have a report here, I'm looking at it--a page out of a deposition that must have been after 1974, that talks about the terminating of money to Hoover-Gorin public relations firm. As I have already said, I was responsible for cutting off that contract. Maybe that's what they're referring to.

PAS: O.K. Judging from your memos, a pattern exists of the White House interceding with the Justice Department on behalf of labor leaders. Did President Nixon tell you or Attorney General [Richard G.] Kleindienst to instruct the Justice Department to go easy on Teamsters such as Fitzsimmons and Presser?

CWC: No, I don't know what memos are being referred to, but, all of my memos went to John Dean, because I was under instructions not to go to the Justice Department ever with any matters of criminal prosecution, but rather they should all be cleared through the Counsel to the President's office. So, I referred everything to John Dean. All I wanted to do was to be sure people were being treated fairly. There were cases where I would get calls from Congressmen and Senators wanting to know why so and so was being prosecuted. I would routinely send that down, and write a memo to Dean. I never followed up directly with the Justice Department, nor did Nixon tell me that he didn't want somebody prosecuted in the Justice Department. He wouldn't have told me, he would have told Mitchell or someone who dealt with the Justice Department. I did not, for a whole lot of reasons, (which I think I explained in the previous tape) I never dealt with the Justice Department.

PAS: According to a memo in the Watergate Special Prosecutor files,

you and Frank Fitzsimmons met with Kleindienst in 1972, and told him that President Nixon wanted the Justice Department to take care of the Presser case. Your recollection of this meeting, if you have one, and why did Nixon want to help Presser?

CWC: A memo in the Watergate Special Prosecutor's file? I'd have to see the memo before I'd know, because I don't remember meeting with Kleindienst and Fitzsimmons. I don't think that I did.

PAS: These documents have to do with this question.

CWC: [Looking at a file] This doesn't have anything to do with Presser. This is a case, I know this case. This was a building trades--the building trades council in New York City....

PAS: I'm sorry, I think I gave you the wrong one. That was from the previous question. Yeah.

CWC: This is a case where I really felt a guy was being persecuted, and the government's case was thrown out of court. With the government being severely chastised for having brought the prosecution in the first place. Then I saw an article, and it looked like they were going to appeal the dropping of the prosecution, after the district court had completely cleared a guy. I sent it over to Dean, and said, "I don't want to get involved in this," because I wasn't supposed to deal with the Justice Department [reading from a file]. Let's see, "Remember we talked to the AG [Attorney General]...." I'm surprised, because I don't remember talking to John Mitchell on any subject. This is one where I thought somebody was being mistreated. I don't mind telling the whole world I got into that case. I remember that case very well.

PAS: O.K.

CWC: [Pause to read document] I think I remember being asked about this. I don't even remember this meeting taking place, and this is according to some informant, apparently, whose identity is being protected. I was asked about this and I did not even remember this meeting taking place. I doubt that Kleindienst would be called to the White House, and then end up seeing me and Fitzsimmons. I mean, that's just not the way things happen. I mean, [reading from the document] "Called to the White House to see the President". "I got a call to come to the White House, saying, 'Look, you'll be personally seeing President Nixon.'" It just doesn't sound the way things happen. I remember being asked this by the Watergate Special Prosecutor and I don't remember any such meeting taking place.

PAS: O.K. This [question] refers to some handwritten notes of yours. Handwritten notes from 1972.

CWC: Right.

PAS: The day of the Teamsters executive board vote to endorse Nixon indicates the vote, sixteen to one. Also, the word "Presser" is written down. Was the vote somehow linked to Bill or Jackie Presser? Why was he mentioned?

CWC: No, the vote wasn't linked to Presser. I don't know why Presser's name is there. The vote was sixteen to one, which meant that Presser voted "for"--Gibbons was the only dissenting vote, I remember that. I can't imagine--I don't know.

PAS: The last question deals with this....

CWC: I can tell by these questions, this is going to be another one of

these books that revives all the conspiratorial theories.

PAS: On July 13, 1972, shortly before the Teamsters endorsement of Nixon for President, you talked with Jim Hodgson about three unfair labor complaints against the Teamsters being dismissed. The question is, did you or someone else at the White House, or [the] Labor Department intercede to get these complaints dismissed? In retrospect, was this proper? (This is, if you did.)

CWC: [Laughter] I don't know. I suppose if they're unfair prosecutions, then the White House can intervene, I don't see why it shouldn't. This is interesting. Obviously I was trying to get these things dismissed before the July 17th date, on which the Teamsters were going to endorse the President, because this is dated July 13, 1972. Sounds like Hodgson thought it was a pretty good idea too, doesn't it? He sounds sanctimonious in his statements these days, but he doesn't sound very sanctimonious in that conversation. We were probably trying to get rid of anything that would make us look bad with the Teamsters, yeah. It's a system of government devised by Andrew Jackson, known as the "spoils system".

PAS: That's right.

CWC: Which translates, "Take care of your friends".

FJG: While I've been sitting here I've been sort of going through some....

[End Side One]

[Begin Side Two]

FJG: I just have one more document on the Bureau of Labor Statistics

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that I came across here. This is dated September 8, 1971, from Malek to Haldeman, and the subject is the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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CWC:

FJG:

CWC: That didn't come out in the Post, did it?

FJG: No.

CWC: Because that is certainly.... Malek certainly was the guy that administered the moves, didn't he?

FJG: He certainly did.

CWC: Did I get a copy of that?

FJG: Yes.

CWC: Oh.

FJG:

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It's

carbon copy to you.

CWC: [Peruses document] Hmm. Well. I don't know, this isn't--well.

This is not Haldeman's writing, this is mine.

FJG: Oh, this is your writing. So, the "Do it now!" is your....

CWC: That was mine.

FJG: And the "I never agreed to this" was also yours.

CWC: Yeah. This must have come out of my files. [Reads from document] "HRH folder". This means it was something I kept to discuss with Haldeman. I'll be darned. Well, I would have thought I wasn't in this process, but I was. We [unintelligible] appointed Julie [Julius] Shiskin to be the Commissioner of the

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Bureau of Labor Statistics, who was Jewish.

FJG: Yeah, my guess is, everybody who's mentioned there is Jewish.

CWC: Sounds like it. Arthur Burns is Jewish.

FJG: As a matter of fact, yes.

CWC: Whom Nixon loved.

FJG: Well, there were times, I don't know if you're aware of this, when Arthur Burns would grate on him.

CWC: Aware of it? I was the guy that was told to put out the story that Burns wanted the Cabinet level salary for himself, when it wasn't true. Which I later repented for greatly. I did put it out, because Nixon insisted upon it.

FJG: Did everybody in the White House do an Arthur Burns imitation? I've talked to a few people from the White House. John Ehrlichman does an Arthur Burns imitation, Bob Haldeman does one; I just wondered if that was fairly common.

CWC: I've never done one, and I never saw anybody do one. It was one night, on the Sequoia, when Nixon was really upset at the fact that Arthur wasn't loosening up money fast enough. He said to me, "I know what we'll do". Haldeman and Ehrlichman and I were the only ones there, and we were sitting on the upper deck of the Sequoia, with drinks in our hands. Nixon said, "Colson, why don't you put out the story,"--no, Cap [Caspar W.] Weinberger was there also, that's right. "Chuck, why don't you put out the story right away that Arthur Burns is looking for a raise to put the Federal Reserve Chairman on the same level as the Cabinet? We'll put some heat on Arthur tonight." I looked at him, and I didn't say anything, I took a note. The next day, I called

Haldeman and I said, "Bob, that's a dumb idea. First of all, it isn't true, because Burns said he would recommend it, but only for his successor. It's a stupid idea." Haldeman growled at me over the phone. He said, "You heard the President's order, do it!" So, I got a hold of somebody in the PR operation under [Herbert G.] Klein and said, "Here's a story for you, get it out." They did, and all hell broke loose. I later went to Arthur Burns and apologized, because it was a real cheap shot at a very fine gentlemen; I loved Arthur Burns. He did get on Nixon's nerves because he was too cautious, and too conservative. No, this is my writing on here. I was more in it than I thought. I'll be darned.

FJG: I have another one, which is not in your handwriting. This is from Haldeman's notes of April 23rd, 197--it has to be '72, or '73; but I really don't know the year. It's about a meeting with the President. He says, "He's very concerned re Colson. The President said to him, 'I now know what kind of a man Colson is'. Told [Ronald L.] Ziegler to call Colson--then said don't talk to him. The President talked to Colson yesterday, and Ziegler had instructions today again." Do you have any idea what this is about?

CWC: Dear me! [Pause to read document] Yeah, I know what this is about. Sure, I can tell you exactly what this is about. This would have been the weekend of April 23rd, or thereabouts, 1973, when the coverup was in full swing. [Notices date of document] Oh, that's a pretty good memory, April 23. Because it was April 30th that they resigned. I know exactly what this is about. On

this weekend they were stewing about what they should do with Haldeman and Ehrlichman, because they were now going to be targets of the investigation. [Reading from document] "The President convinced we have no legal concern, may not even have a public relations concern. But can not type of man who can run this country". Yeah, O.K. In other words, we've got to do something to get the problem out of our hair. O.K. They were very concerned about me at this time, you're absolutely right. [Again reading from document] "The way to do this is Haldeman and Ehrlichman to submit resignation at own request, resign; day of resignation to be determined. He's very concerned re Colson." My opinion is that the "he" is Ziegler. All of these things are Ziegler's points. [Reading again] "Ziegler raised point where this would prejudice their case," et cetera. "President convinced we have no legal concern". "Ziegler said, 'What if they relieve themselves of duties[?] President pointed to his head". "Ziegler emphasized this can't be separated from you. The President says must go out to the public," et cetra. "Way to do this is Haldeman and Ehrlichman.... He's very concerned re Colson." The "he"...

FJG: Is Ziegler.

CWC: ...is Ziegler. Who was extremely concerned about it. Because, on the weekend of the sixteenth, I had come to Ehrlichman with my lawyer, [David] Shapiro (and law partner) and said that the cover-up is going to kill the White House. That memo is in the Special Prosecutor's file, because we wrote a memorandum of what we told Ehrlichman that weekend, and Ehrlichman wrote a

memorandum. So that's all in the file.

Until then I had had very close communication with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, [and] Ziegler until I went in on the sixteenth, which was a Saturday afternoon, and told them that they had real problems with obstruction of justice, they had real problems with the law--I went right down the list with them, and suggested the President appoint a special counsel to get himself off of the hook, and that whoever had to resign, had to resign. At this point, they were very suspicious that I had gone over to the prosecutor's side; I hadn't. I was telling them what they needed to hear but didn't want to. "He's very concerned re Colson. Said I now know what kind of man Colson is." That's Ziegler speaking; they were loving to put it onto me at this point.

Well, maybe that could be the President. Very concerned about what I was going to do. That could be the President or Ziegler because it says, "Tell Ziegler to call Colson, and then said don't talk to him". Ziegler did call me this weekend, on a Saturday night, the 23rd, this very night, because I was at Princeton, visiting my son when the call came from Camp David. It was Ziegler, and he said, "The President has asked me to find out from you what he should do with Haldeman and Ehrlichman". I said, "Fire them, they have to go." Ziegler said to me, "I agree with you, but nobody around here likes that idea". I said, "It doesn't make any difference, that's what has to happen". So,... Oh yeah, O.K., "The President talked to Colson yesterday", that's exactly right. "Ziegler had instructions today again." Ziegler did call me. I don't know, "Tell Ziegler to call Colson--then

said don't talk to him". I don't understand that. "He's very concerned [about] Colson" could be either the President or Ziegler. So, "I now know what kind of man Colson is". They were very suspicious of me. "The President talked to Colson yesterday." I did talk to him. That should be on a tape, because they hadn't disconnected the taping system.

FJG: That's right, it was still on.

CWC: The twenty second should be on a tape. But the Ziegler conversation I vividly remember because he got me in my son's dormitory room at Princeton. I remember his asking me that question, and I told him what the answer was. It seemed to me the President called me the next day, but maybe he called me on the day before. That's what that's about.

FJG: O.K. I have one question, in a lighter vein.

CWC: I was looked at as possibly an enemy at that time. Finally, the President called me, (which you also have heard on a tape) the night he fired Haldeman and Ehrlichman, and said, "God bless you Chuck, you were right from the beginning." But he used to play people against each other. I took that at the time with a grain of salt. He needed me then as a friend. Then I sent him a memo the next day, recommending he appoint [Alexander M.] Haig as his chief of staff, which he did. Maybe as a result of my recommendation, I don't know.

FJG: Why did you recommend Haig?

CWC: I felt he was the only guy [who] could step into the White House at that point. He knew the White House, he knew the President, who had some independent stature of his own, and he could pull it

all together. Now, Haig was a very good administrator.

FJG: Did you have contacts with Haig after he became chief of staff?

CWC: Yes.

FJG: About what?

CWC: Several times. He would call me and ask me to see him, to find out what the Special Prosecutor was doing. He called me and asked my advice on how to handle things periodically. He asked me to meet with [J.] Fred Buzhardt several times. He asked me about [Archibald] Cox, and how Cox was handling things. I went out to his house. In January of '74, I went out to Al Haig's home, and visited with him. When we discovered all the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] files, and how much the CIA had been involved in all of this, in disseminating information about the President. The President talked to me about it, and asked me to go visit Al, and I went out to Al's house (out MacArthur Boulevard somewhere) and we spent several hours on a Sunday afternoon at his home. I had a lot of contacts with him. After I got indicted, then I didn't have any more contacts, but I had had quite a few.

FJG: Had you had many contacts before he became chief of staff?

CWC: We worked very closely together, more or less.

FJG: On what issues? Do you recall?

CWC: Well, you've probably gathered from the tapes and the notes, the President talked to me about a lot of things. He would ask me to do things, a lot of them in the foreign policy area, periodically. There was a lot of overlap in our offices on different issues. I would deal with Haig on those, and there

were a lot of public relations things we'd do on foreign policy issues, and I would always do it with Haig. I would always deal with Haig, if I could avoid dealing with Henry, because it was easier dealing with Haig. I dealt with Henry when I had to.

FJG: I seem to recall reading in the files that you had some contact with Haig on a fellow named Charles or Melville Stephens,...

PAS: Charles Stephens.

CWC: Yeah, Charles--uh, Mel Stephens.

FJG: ...who was supposed to infiltrate the new left radical organizations.

CWC: That's correct. The Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Mel Stevens was a--or was it Charles?

PAS: That's what I copied down from your notes.

FJG: Well, it's confusing. There is a document in which you mention him, you call him Charles Stephens, but it is Melville Stephens, as you said.

CWC: There was another Stephens, and there may be two here, but Mel Stephens ended up working on my staff. Mel Stephens ended up working on my staff, who was a Vietnam veteran, who was pro-Vietnam policies and a supporter of the President. I brought him in to meet with the President a couple of times, because he was forming an organization to counter the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. It was sort of a patriotic, 'support the President' kind of group. I brought Mel Stephens in, who happened to be in the office the day the Pentagon Papers were released, and that's how I remember that. He then became a witness to what Kissinger said that day. Mel Stephens then ended up working on my staff

handling veterans affairs.

There was a Charles Stephens, I think, or a name like that, who was another guy who was, who came to us with a proposal. He wanted to know if he could get ten thousand dollars to help support him, because he was going to infiltrate the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I went to Haig to ask if there was any CIA money available, and Haig said no. That's what you said, that we couldn't use money for that purpose.

FJG: I have a document, perhaps in a lighter vein here. This is from...

CWC: At this juncture they're all in a light vein.

[Laughter]

FJG: ...from Haldeman, presumably to you, in the Cabinet Room on October 27, 1971. It's in Haldeman's handwriting, and it just says, "I know my place." I wondered if you had any recollection of what that was about?

CWC: Is this to me?

FJG: Yes.

PAS: It was in your files.

FJG: It was in your files.

CWC: In my files?

FJG: Yes.

CWC: The only thing I can figure out is, that we were sitting next to each other in the Cabinet Room, October 1971--I don't know what the subject would have been, but I probably would have suggested that Bob either get a note to the President or say something to the President, or recommend something to the President, and Bob

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would answer back, and say, "I know my place". Or there might have been a joke, I might have been kidding; I used to love to kid people. Bob was pretty good at kidding back. Pure guess.

FJG: Do you remember another occasion where he reamed you out about something, and as a result you sent him a paper bag with two walnuts in it, with a note, "You've got 'em"?

[Laughter]

CWC: Yes [laughter]. I don't remember what he reamed me out about, but there was something that he was really livid about, and he was right, and he had me. So, I sent him my testicles in a paper bag.

[Laughter]

FJG: Do you have the Billy Graham stuff?

PAS: Yeah, the Billy Graham stuff.

FJG: O.K. Looking through the files, there were a few references to Billy Graham's support for the administration, political support for the administration. The earliest one is September 21, 1970. A memo to you marked, "Eyes Only", from Haldeman.

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Do you remember anything about that?

CWC: No. No, but Nixon used to talk to Graham once in a while. He would call him up, and I was in the office when he would do it. He would use him as just sort of a guy to talk over ideas with and ask for opinions and reactions. I don't think it had

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anything to do with Billy Graham's spiritual role. I think it was more that he looked at Billy as a public figure who would kind of know what was going on in the world. He could kind of sound him out on things. He looked at him as kind of part of his establishment. This was the kind of memo we used to get all the time, and I used to laugh at a lot of them as long as I could laugh at them.

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I know where these came from. These are Nixon's memos, which he would dictate to his secretary, and then say, "Have Haldeman send this to Colson". It was actually written, many times, written by Nixon. The only reason I know that, is that one of Haldeman's secretaries, an Italian name, a lovely girl, came to work for me after she'd worked for Haldeman. She used to type a lot of the memos, and she'd say, "You know, those memos you used to get from Haldeman, those weren't from Haldeman. I would type them because they were Nixon's memos, and then I'd put Haldeman's name on them." The girl later worked for me and that's the only reason I knew that. I could always tell which was from Nixon and which was from Haldeman.

This is written by Haldeman.

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That's Haldeman language, that's not Nixon. But I could tell by looking at a memo, instantly, that that was either from Nixon or Haldeman. The ones from Haldeman, I would usually laugh at, but not do much with that. I knew why he wrote them. He would sit with the President, the President would tell him

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something, and he'd write a memo. Then, if the President asked him what happened, he'd say, "Well, I sent that over to Colson". It was the typical government game. Those I usually would do nothing with, because there wasn't much to do.

FJG: Hm hmm. O.K. Here's one from you to Howard Cohen, July 5, 1972.

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That's your language

[unintelligible].

CWC: That's mine.

PAS: I was at that festival,...

CWC: Really!

PAS: ...and I--yes, "Explo '72", in Dallas. I remember that there was a telegram read from Nixon.

CWC: Sure, would have been. I was with Nixon in his office when Graham called him after the "Godstock" festival, and (that's funny), and told him how many kids were sympathetic with him. We tried many ways to use Billy Graham. That was back when I was in the business of manipulating religious leaders. I now preach against it, and write against it, but I used to do it. We tried to get his mailing lists, and to his credit, he successfully resisted. The only thing he ever did for us, that I remember, politically, was that we asked him if he would assemble some

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evangelical leaders, and bring them into the Roosevelt Room, so we could give them a real snow job, and we did a few times. But he wasn't part of manipulating them; he simply helped us arrange a perfectly legitimate briefing. That's about all that I can remember that he did.

This would have been the result of--Ken Rietz was the youth guy for the Committee for the Reelection of the President. Howard Cohen was the guy that worked youth in our office.

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This would be a typical memo that I would write, when either Haldeman or the President would tell me to do something. What happened to it, I don't know.

PAS:

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CWC: Oh dear me, I had the job of working with Ross Perot. That probably shows up in the files, doesn't it?

FJG: Yes, it does.

CWC: Which was one of the more colorful experiences I had in the White House. Because Ross Perot came in and dazzled Alex [Alexander P.] Butterfield and the President, that he could get the POW's [Prisoners of War] back; He came in on a big POW kick. The guy was an amazing operator. I don't know anybody in the whole four years that I was in the White House who was able to muscle

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themselves in quicker into the President's own confidence. The President would call me in and tell me that Ross Perot was prepared to put up thirty million dollars for support apparatus for the President outside of the White House. Public service-- public interest groups that would be supportive of the President's policies in Vietnam and the patriotic efforts and flag waving things, and campaigns to get the POW's home. The President was absolutely taken by this guy, totally. So, Haldeman got me in one day and said, "Your job is to set up this apparatus outside; your job is to work with Ross Perot; your job is to get the money; to get a group of lawyers outside; hire a law firm; get a tax exempt organization established that would be public interest oriented, that'll be a conservative group. Ross Perot's going to put in thirty million dollars". I said, "Manna from heaven". I came rushing back to my office, and got ahold of some lawyers in town, and got some drafts on how we could set up such committees and foundations.

The next time Perot came to the White House, he was told to visit with me, so he did, he came into my office. I met him and we had a lovely talk, and I said, "Now, you're going to put up the money and do this?" He said, "Yes". I said, "Great, let's get going". So, we got everything set up, and I called him up and said, "We're ready to start funding it". He came up with one stall after another. It was absolutely amazing. But all the while he was stalling, he was still getting in to see the President. He'd call up Alex Butterfield or he'd show up at seven o'clock in the morning. He would call up Butterfield and

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say, "I'd like to meet the President at 7:30". They'd walk him in through the french doors from the Rose Garden, and he'd visit with the President and go out. I mean, I never have figured out how he managed to do that, except that he really impressed the President.

Finally, one night I was getting dressed for a white tie dinner at the White House. I was in my office changing my clothes. Ross Perot was outside waiting. I didn't have time to see him--and my patience was running out. So, I got him into my office while I was dressing and I said, "Ross, it's time to put up or shut up. Are you going to put up any money?" For six months he'd been promising money, and the money had never come. I can remember standing there in my skivvy shorts, and putting on my black pants, and him sitting on my sofa in my office. I said, "If we don't see some money within a week, I'm going to decide that you're nothing but a phony." He left my office, I never saw him again, and he kind of dissappeared from the White House. He never put up a nickel. He parlayed that offer of thirty million dollars into access, which ended up costing him nothing. It is one of the most effective con jobs I ever saw in the White House. The fellow's been phenomenally successful and a titan of American industry, but that's the way he operated. I'm one of the few guys that, I guess, knows that. I well remember those evenings with him.

FJG: As part of the PR apparatus, I have here a memo to you from Jeb Magruder, (who was at the Committee to Reelect) January 3, 1972.

It says,

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CWC: We did this constantly. This was a steady thing. We had an operation going called "little lies" or something, and the President would mark things on his margin of his news summary. He would always read it, send it over, saying, "Colson, answer this, so and so answer this". Part of my job was to have people responding to things that were said about the President. And so, I would get people writing letters to the editor. I had a kind of a network set up for people who were writing letters to the editor. Then we got a little more sophisticated, and Jeb Magruder set up a phone bank for people who would complain about adverse press coverage, to create the impression you had public outrage. There were some local polls on the war that we rigged. I think it was WTOP, ran a poll, saying, "Do you favor the President's bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, and mining of Haiphong harbor on May 7, 1972?" I distinctly remember calling Magruder and saying, "Get the phone calls in". Six to one, the public supported it, but probably eighty percent of those calls were ones we had made. At least, we bragged about making them, I don't know if we actually made them. But we did this kind of thing frequently, this was a common practice. We were roundly

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pillorried for it during Watergate. Rightly so, because we did it.

FJG: Did you also generate mail to the White House, looking to report that...?

CWC: No, I don't think.... Oh, yeah, yeah, sure. We had urged telegrams to the White House so that we could count them. Somehow, I don't think we invented this, but maybe we perfected the art.

[Laughter]

FJG: OK, well, thank you, Mr. Colson.

PAS: Thank you.

CWC: O.K.

[End of interview]

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conducted by Frederick J. Graboske and Paul A. Schmidt  
at Mr. Colson's office in Reston, Virginia  
on September 21, 1988

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