

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A MEETING
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND CHARLES W. COLSON
ON FEBRUARY 13, 1973 AT 9:48 TO 10:52 AM

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PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) that's come from the other you can't get Webster there ah, well you need a man. Would you keep Gray?

COLSON: Yes, sir I would now.

PRESIDENT: Now you could send him to the Senate for confirmation.

COLSON: Ah, yep. I would.

PRESIDENT: Why?

COLSON: Well, because first of all, I-I could back him up with a very strong Deputy. Ah, because I think if you took Gray out now, with all of the turmoil in the Bureau and every ah-, the- the everything that's goin' on in that Bureau is being leaked out.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Well, how could we stop it?
(Unintelligible)

COLSON: Ah, by creating certainty. You see, I'm afraid one of the problems of it is that there isn't anybody who knows they're insured. Ah, now...

PRESIDENT: Who's the Deputy you have in mind?

COLSON: Well, I'd suggest that Bill Sullivan is ah he's ah

PRESIDENT: They say he's (unintelligible)...

COLSON: oh, he is.

PRESIDENT: He was (unintelligible) again.

COLSON: Well, he was our man, that's.

PRESIDENT: I know

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COLSON: Ah, Al Haig has called me yesterday and said, Jesus, ya know, get Sullivan back in there. Ah, Haig is very high on Sullivan. I don't know Sullivan- but I know of so many people who do think highly of him, and that those are all the people I.

PRESIDENT: In what way (unintelligible)

COLSON: No, sir. I don't think so.

PRESIDENT: Did they also make your reflection on Gray --Vesco--(unintelligible) investigation of Watergate appearance?

COLSON: Yeah. I think in a way it is. And ah, you might want to move Gray at the end of the year, but ah, I'd get through this year without, without rockin' that boat and I would try to get in ah, confirm Gray he's after all-, Gray's loyalty to, to you...

PRESIDENT: Totally

COLSON: Totally. So, give him the strength and back him up with som- couple people and ah, make sure he- make sure he understands what he has to do. I mean there- ah, the most important thing over there is to be God damn sure th-that the Department and that Bureau understand that ah, we've got enough troubles with the Hill without creating any more for ourselves.

PRESIDENT: Right

COLSON: And this is a partisan game. This is no longer Law Enforcement or Investigation. This is part of...

PRESIDENT: Sure. What'd you mean, Watergate?

COLSON: Watergate.

PRESIDENT: Oh, hell, yes.

COLSON: And ah, I-I read this.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) partisan press news never heard of (unintelligible) Ehrlichman. God damn racist. (Unintelligible) everything.
(Laughs)

COLSON: Hysterical. But they're gonna make a, they'll have a political circus. Ah, but it is...

PRESIDENT: Remember how they built up that poor jackass Ralph Landers?

COLSON: Yeah

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) When he--McCarthy built him up as a great saint, poor bastard. Well, he's an idiot.

COLSON: Well...

PRESIDENT: He's a sweet guy, Ralph. Landers. (Unintelligible)

COLSON: Well, no, lie was nothin'.

PRESIDENT: But he took McCarthy out.

COLSON: McCarthy's great comment about bring the butterfly net (unintelligible) (Laughs)

PRESIDENT: Oh, God, I wish we had, I wish we had more of Pat Gray's. Well any way, that's that. Oh, so long- I got (unintelligible). I feel that there's a couple of good guys who work around here, everyone around here forgets the God damn thing in the White House. (unintelligible) (noise). (cough) You just figure you're gonna have s-, leaks, television, press- and just say that's underneath us. (cough) Ah, ah, how do you feel? Is there anything else you could do?

COLSON: Well, the only thing you can do Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: I mean if you can't, you've got to get for example Magruder's operation, lialdeman, and Ehrlichman and the rest, Dean,

COLSON: Yes

PRESIDENT: if they all get into this, they're gonna go through the ITT thing (unintelligible)

COLSON: Well, of course, that's what they want to do to us, you know? That's-the whole point of that ex-exercise...

PRESIDENT: To burn some others

COLSON: Correct. Correct.

PRESIDENT: Now don't you agree we should stay away?

COLSON: I think we have to- I don't think there's any choice but to, but to go up there and tough it through. And ah, I do think -we have to be very, very hardnose to that committee. And ah, if they want Haldeman, Ehrlichman, me, I'm sure they will, ah we have to limit the areas that they're gonna go into, and I mean.

PRESIDENT: Well, I'm not sure. The best thing there (unintelligible) you can let them have lower people like, ah, Chapin and Strachan and the rest- Hell, I never talked to Chapin and Strachan and the rest- Let them have them, and ah, but in terms of the people that are direct advisors to the President you can say they can do it by written interrogatories, by having, uh, Ervin and (unintelligible), ah majority, the two counsel, majority and minority leaders do it- written interrogatories but don't go up there on television.

COLSON: Umm hmm

PRESIDENT: I'll bet some feel that's a possible compromise.

COLSON: I think it's a good compromise. Ah, there's a risk, ya know, but ah...

PRESIDENT: They may not-they may not accept it. But uh, I don't think- I had thought that maybe we ought to j-just harden and say nobody can go. I'm afraid that that gives an appearance of total cover up, which would bother me a bit, ya know, I should just say no, you can't have Chapin, you can't have Strachan, you can't have, ya-know, and since the White House won't allow anybody-you may let them have some others. I don't know. I mean maybe we could think about it. I, I Can't get him to talk about it just to testify. That'll break it down to Kissinger-break it down to Haldeman and Ehrlichman-can't do that. And ah, of course that's why you can't go- the people that are, who have direct access to the President can't- go.

COLSON: Well you know the difficulty with it Mr. President? Ah, I've been thinkin' about this over the weekend, I tried talkin' through with one of my ah perceptive law partners, who's a brilliant, brilliant trial lawyer and his point was, which I thought was a God damn good one, he said, you can't go at all. He says there's nothing in the facts of the Watergate, the Segretti, that you had any involvement in, at all. But they're gonna start asking you other questions, and and...

PRESIDENT: That you were involved in also.

COLSON: And, they're gonna com- well, something that I may not even be thinking about right now. But, ah...

PRESIDENT: In the campaign

COLSON: In the campaign, sure. Or in the, in the pre-campaign period, and ah, things that have not a damn thing to do with Watergate, or Segretti but, but ah.

PRESIDENT: Well, their license ah, apparently, ah is to go on everything in the campaign.

COLSON: Yeah, that's right.

PRESIDENT: That's the problem.

COLSON: But why should one, wh- ya know, that, that's an area where y-you don- don't, you don't know where to draw the line. You can't be a little bit pregnant, and ah...

PRESIDENT: Well, we'll decide (unintelligible) cross that bridge till we get to it.

COLSON: No. I think you're right in terms of trying to limit those who have had direct access to you, because th-that creates a problem And...

PRESIDENT: I'm sure absolutely.

COLSON: I would ah, ah...

PRESIDENT: But even there, I mean, based on the (unintelligible), I don't think you can (unintelligible) alone as a certainty at the Chapin and Strachan level, I don't think I would go that low.

COLSON: No, and I don't think you need to.

PRESIDENT: (unintelligible)

COLSON: Sure. That doesn't make any difference, let them do it. And let them take the whole damn committee apparatus. Ah, of course, the other point which I'm gonna mention to Haldeman before I take off is that if- who ever did- order Watergate, ah- if it's gonna come out in the hearings, for God sakes, let it out...

PRESIDENT: Step out now

COLSON: Least get rid of it now, take our losses.

PRESIDENT: Well, who the hell do you think did this? Mitchell? He can't do it, he'll perjure himself so he won't admit it. Now that's the problem. Magruder?

COLSON: Ah, I-I know Magruder does.

PRESIDENT: Well then he's perjured himself, hasn't he ?

COLSON: Probably

PRESIDENT: Alright. What'd you say then? Let's take our losses- who the hell's gonna step forward and say it? See my point? . You've got it set-Liddy ah, Liddy of course is ah, he directed Watergate. But ah, who do you have in mind? I mean I'm afraid that can't risk it, Chuck, unless you have somebody in mind.

COLSON: No! I-I, w-well

PRESIDENT: My advice, my advice - would you suggest Mitchell, go in and say why (unintelligible). This must've occurred, I did not realize it at the time, but ah...

COLSON: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Mitchell seems to have stonewalled it up to this point (unintelligible).

COLSON: Well, he's- ya know, John has got one of those marvelous ah, memories that I don't know. I don't remember what was said. Ah.

PRESIDENT: I was busy at the time.

COLSON: Yeah

PRESIDENT: (unintelligible)

COLSON: I don't know.

PRESIDENT: That's his point.

COLSON: I haven't seen anything yet, related to this whole, incident that has not come out one way or another. And it's just that slow painful process of pulling it out piece by piece. Ah,

PRESIDENT: Of course I want you to believe me on this, Chuck, although it s just being repetitious.

COLSON: Oh hell!

PRESIDENT: When I'm speaking about Watergate though, that's the whole point of the election this tremendous investigation rests. Unless one of the seven, begins to talk. That's the problem.

COLSON: But, you never know. You never know.

PRESIDENT: Well then the question is as far as the seven, that the only ones that really know, Hunt knows, I would imagine, I imagine Liddy would know. McCord?

COLSON: Probably.

PRESIDENT: Alright. Go for (unintelligible).

COLSON: Well, what my perceptive partner, who knows Sirica very, very well and has tried many cases in front of Sirica, what he thinks Sirica will do, at the critical moment is, call in one of them and say, O.K., you don't go to jail if you tell me everything you know. And ah...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) immunity?

COLSON: Make a deal with them, before he sentences them.

PRESIDENT: Would they accept this?

COLSON: Would they accept it? (draw deep breath) I don't think Hunt would. Ah...

PRESIDENT: You don't

COLSON: No. No, I really don't, no. I mean I think he's a...

PRESIDENT: Extremist?

COLSON: Yeah. He's too much of a believer. On the other hand, who knows, ya know. He's lost his wife which was a great source of strength to him. He's ah, got four kids.

PRESIDENT: Trouble in Hunt's case, which is that, he has contact with you, Ehrlichman, on other matters.

COLSON: Sure.

PRESIDENT: That's the problem you see?

COLSON: Sure. But it- but they're not matters that I'm really concerned about. Ah, so we went and interviewed someone on ITT, but that's per-perfectly logical as...That's what ya have a fellow like available for.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: But the, the, ya know, the whole, th-the, the unfortunate part of it is, and you-you're, it's imperative that people here not get bogged down in it.

PRESIDENT: Yes

COLSON: The unfortunate part of it is, that it is a diversion. Ah, th-there's no limit to what they can do with it if they wanted-- and the reason you have to hard line it with certain people...

PRESIDENT: Umm hmm

COLSON: ...is that there is no limit to what they can do to it in terms of- well, hell, ya know, even arranging the Democrats for Nixon ads, ah, yeah, we had some technical violations of the statute. Ah, a few mailings that were done by ah, different committees outside of here. Yeah. Those were technical violations of the statute. Somebody (unintelligible) can't. But ya know, if you wanted to make them into capitol cases, you can.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

COLSON: Sure. Sure, but...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

COLSON: But the, certainly, but the problem is that they're, they're just gonna get the if they could get Ehrlichman, Haldeman or me, to say under oath that we were aware of anything that was a violation of the statute, then they've got a circus on their hands.

PRESIDENT: Umm hmm,

COLSON: And, ah, either you have to have a John Mitchell type memory or, (laughs) or not appear.

PRESIDENT: Your (unintelligible) would be to let Strachan go, let Chapin go.

COLSON: My view is all wrong, always (unintelligible). But, but, but in the case of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and I, ah, the only three you can probably do this with, ah, that they should be either written interrogatories or appointive type things where they, they list out some highly specific areas. And that's it and not beyond that. And if they try to get beyond that, you just, you hard-you stonewall it or you, ah, (sighs) or you just don't remember something when you have to.