

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A MEETING AMONG
THE PRESIDENT, JOHN EHRLICHMAN AND H.R.
HALDEMAN ON APRIL 16, 1973, FROM 9:50 TO
9:59 A.M.

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PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) John, I want him to, uh, to
uh, before I see Dean. I tell ya what I
really want, I want him to sign.

EHRLICHMAN: Did you get those?

PRESIDENT: Yes, I did.

PRESIDENT: I'm going to have him sign. I'm going to
ask him which one he wants to sign and say
about that news clip that, uh, it seems to
me that I should not, uh, I mean I, I, don't
want to press anything and uh, I'm not, or,
or, should I just have him sign it, whether
it's effective today or uh, not announce it.
What's your advice on that? We've got plenty
of time. Don't worry about that.

EHRLICHMAN: Well, my -as I made them out it occurred to

me that uh he ought to sign both of them. Then, you could use whichever one you wanted or not depending on how circumstances unfold.

PRESIDENT: OK, that's right, that's right. Good

EHRlichman: And if he won't. You know, you know what to do at that point.

HALDEMAN: And if he--you go, you go to Petersen and-ask you not to...

SEVERAL VOICES: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: I still have, that's right, I still have my option to do that. The second point, John, that I want to nail down, uh, what Dean said about other bugs from the White House and so forth and so on. Aren't, isn't -I assume that's the Plumbing operation.

EHRlichman: No, no, no. What he's referring to there...

PRESIDENT: about the FBI--

EHRlichman: is, is the FBI bugs on the journalists in the first year.

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PRESIDENT: This was not from you, He thought these were private bugs.

EHRlichman: Oh no. No, no. These, these

PRESIDENT: No, he said they were

EHRlichman: Yeah, well, I

PRESIDENT: ...private bugs.

EHRlichman: These were

PRESIDENT: That he knew about.

EHRlichman: These were almost all FBI bugs, but not entirely though.

PRESIDENT: What, what is he, what is he referring to if it what I'm just saying

EHRlichman: They're all national security.

PRESIDENT: Well, that's what I mean.

EHRlichman: But, I...

PRESIDENT: I was wondering if -what's your advice, if I should not tell him today that anything in that area is national security and privileged.

EHRlichman: I think you should, and I think it should cover not only that, but the Plunbing operation, and uh, anything else of which he has knowledge.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: Say I am impressing that with Executive Privilege right now.

PRESIDENT: Executive privilege.

EHRlichman: And I don't want to ever hear...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...that you have discussed those matters...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...with any third person.

PRESIDENT: I don't know whether he did. He might have.

EHRlichman: Well, you might ask him if he has...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: afterwards, uh, or before. But...

PRESIDENT: But I -see, that didn't occur to me last night it occurred to me (unintelligible) in which case I'm going to get him in.

EHRlichman: Now, if you remember that whole operation was because you were afraid there were leaks out of the NSC.

PRESIDENT: That's right, that's right.

EHRlichman: And you were trying to find them.

PRESIDENT: I thought we were --, I thought they were through the FBI.

EHRlichman: Well, almost all of them

PRESIDENT: We were going to do some of them.

EHRlichman: Almost all of them were but there was one in Georgetown at somebody's house that actually never was-put on. It wasn't feasible, but it was explored and, and how Dean knows about that, I don't know. The FBI files...

PRESIDENT: Query, Does Liddy know?

EHRlichman: I can't, I can't say. I doubt it. I think that was before his time.

PRESIDENT: The reason that I made the call while in Dean's presence last night was that he said that Liddy's--Liddy would say how he knows this, that Liddy had told the Bureau or something like that. I said, "Sean, .what should I do?" "Well," he said, "you ought to get a hold of his attorney." I said "Yeah, (unintelligible) his attorney"(unintelligible) and he said, he said, "Liddy says he will not talk because of -_ higher authority." I said, "Now look here, higher authorities, it's not the President, it's Mitchell." And I said, "Well"--

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PRESIDENT: so I called Petersen, I said, "You are to
(continued) tell Liddy's attorney that -or Liddy, that there's,
the President's not asking" -Don't you think that's
the correct thing to do?

HALDEMAN: That's --

EHRlichman: It can't hurt anything at this point and it
certainly is consistent with the things you had me
do with Mitchell and Magruder.

PRESIDENT: Such as like what? The--

EHRlichman: Remove any impediment against their testifying by
reason of any misplaced loyalty to you.

PRESIDENT: One thing I was, uh, Bob will run over with you
(unintelligible), the uh, uh, subject is very
important to just tick it off briefly, before one,
that if you and he can sit down today and put both
your cases down at their worst as how you think
it's going to come out, you know, so that I can
look at them and as I say, I'm not gonna, I'm not
gonna make any God damn hasty decisions until I see
what the hell, how this bounces around, because
-Petersen is obviously reacting to the Magruder
thing.

BULL: [At door] John Dean is here, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) about five or ten minutes.
(Unintelligible) building construction
(unintelligible) Christ! Uh, it's obviously
disturbed so that -and they're out to demonstrate
over there doing this job. The second point is
that uh, I would like also a scenario evolved with
regard to, uh, the President's role, in other
words, when the President began to find out about
this, what he did, I think it's a pretty good role
John, I'm, I'm not sure of it. It's as good as I
can guess because remember I got Dean in, first I
said I wanted him to report, sent him to Camp
David. He came back and said he couldn't and I
want to ask him about that today, and then you, and
I'd like you to give Steve your report and
everything you did -see what I mean. Also, then,
third, there is the PR thing, as to, when we, when
we disclosed that and haw.

EHRlichman: Ziegler has just left my office. He feels we have
no more than twelve hours.

PRESIDENT: Right.

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EHRlichman: Uh, he, he's got some, uh, input from the Post and uh, it's his estimate that unless we take the initiative by nine o'clock tonight,

PRESIDENT: Uh hum.

EHRlichman: uh, it will be too late. Now, for that reason, I would suggest that Ziegler sit in a meeting with Petersen and that you and Ziegler persuade Petersen that the announcement has to come from the White House.

PRESIDENT: I'll tell him.

EHRlichman: Uh, otherwise the Justice Department will, of course, try and

PRESIDENT: Uh, huh.

EHRlichman: pre-empt this whole thing.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: But I think it would be a good idea for you to spend, uh,...

PRESIDENT: I don't -I think, I think I've got to get Petersen in alone first.

EHRlichman: Sure, sure, I understand.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) then I'll pull Ziegler in.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

EHRlichman: Uh...

PRESIDENT: That's a very good point.

EHRlichman: Now, you may want to listen to Ron for some time ahead of time. He's got this well thought through and, and well laid out, and I think he's quite dispassionate about it, quite, quite, uh...

HALDEMAN: Well, we'll go over that with him.

EHRlichman: Yeah, we'll do that now while you're gone.

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HALDEMAN: There's one point in -before you talk to Dean that, that I, occurred to me last night that doesn't fit together. Maybe it doesn't matter, and that is you said, last night, as I understood it, that Petersen had told you that Liddy has not talked.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: And that they can't get Liddy to talk.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Dean told us that Liddy had told them everything.

EHRlichman: Told the U.S. Attorney everything.

HALDEMAN: There's something screwy...

EHRlichman: Informally.

HALDEMAN: There's something screwy...

PRESIDENT: I know that, I know that, but I...

HALDEMAN: Petersen's either lying to you or Dean's lying to us.

PRESIDENT: I may be, maybe a little bold but, what I think is probably closer to the truth is that Dean started this business a few weeks ago with his attorneys.

HALDEMAN: Uh um.

EHRlichman: Uh um.

PRESIDENT: ...and decided to save his ass and his attorney's, went in and probably the U.S. Attorney gave him a snow job and said that you're -that Liddy has talked.

EHRlichman: Either that or Dean used that story as a cover-up...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: ...in case anything started to seep out.

PRESIDENT: Did a cover-up.

HALDEMAN: Yeah. Then it would of come from Liddy rather than...

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EHRlichman: Yeah, yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...from him.

PRESIDENT: How's Ron think it ought to be done? I should do it.

EHRlichman: Uh, Ron thinks that it ought to be done from here, uh, that uh... well, he hasn't said whether you should do it. Uh, I mentioned it to him the other day that you thought you should do it here in the Press room, if you did it at all.

PRESIDENT: I could do it right here in the Oval Office.

EHRlichman: Yes, uh, but he, he wants to get out the fact that uh, Dean disserved you, that the Dean report was inadequate, it didn't go far enough, that, uh, several weeks ago, uh, you reinstituted uh, uh, an examination of the...

PRESIDENT: I began my personal investigation of the case.

EHRlichman: Yeah, and that this culminated in a whole series of actions

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: over the weekend.

PRESIDENT: Personal investigation of the case in that I spent the weekend working on it. I think that's what we've got to say. The Dean rep, report, did not, did not, uh...

HALDEMAN: That this is the week of Mitchell being here Saturday is very important to the circumstances.

PRESIDENT: That's right. But uh, the President asked Ehrlichman to conduct his own investigation.

EHRlichman: Well, now, if I'm going to be, if I'm going to be splashed on this thing, you're better off not having another discredited Dean.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, well, somebody's got to do it.

EHRlichman: Well, you can downplay who did it.

HALDEMAN: You can say you did it yourself by talking to all the people...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...concerned.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

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HALDEMAN: You talked to me and Ehrlichman and everybody else...

SEVERAL VOICES: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: I, I made my own investigation of the matter.

EHRlichMAN: I think that's that's the way.

PRESIDENT: My own investigation of the matter. But I didn't talk to Mitchell, see.

EHRlichMAN: Well, they say who did and you delegated me to do that. I mean that's, that's -but, uh,...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) Ehrlichman
(unintelligible) look you're splash though is only on this one God damn thing.

EHRlichMAN: Well, I think there's a, there's a judgment call here,

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichMAN: as to whether you want the quote Ehrlichman report unquote...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichMAN: ...out in the, in the media.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: (unintelligible) because they'll make a big thing about the Dean report...

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: found out that Dean was guilty and the Ehrlichman report found out that Ehrlichman...

PRESIDENT: Right. No, no. Now query, uh, would you mind telling Moore to see Gray or is that out of the question. I mean he, you can talk to him can't you. The only point is time is of the essence right now. I, you know, I, I, I, I've got odds and ends here today that I have to...

EHRlichMAN: I, I understand

PRESIDENT: No, I'll do it.

EHRlichMAN: No, no, I'll take care of it.

PRESIDENT: Alright, what you can say is -give him the two by four, say now, look here, here's the situation. Have you talked to Fielding yet to find out what the situation is?

EHRlichman: No. No. No, as a matter of fact, I I've got a problem here. I'm going to have Moore talk to Fielding also,...

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: and find out what was in there, because I don't want to know.

PRESIDENT: Right, that's right (unintelligible) that's great.

EHRlichman: And then Moore can advise you.

PRESIDENT: OK, and, uh, -then, I don't know what statement I'd like to have Ron, maybe between now and the time --I, I, I, I, I've put off my, the meeting with the guy at 1:30, John.

EHRlichman: Um.

PRESIDENT: Uh, Petersen, I mean, I had to because I couldn't get time to go through...

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...what he wants. (unintelligible) but that's just well enough because it gives me a chance when I get back to take my breath and take a look at that.

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: And be ready for it. But uh, but I'm, uh, I'm not going to let him, uh, him put this out that the Justice Department dragged this out of the White House. You God damned rights. In fact I'll, uh, -now I can have him do it.

EHRlichman: Well, I'll tell you what you might do is have him standing by you...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...just standing there, you do it, and then you say Petersen here is...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...working with me on this.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Yesterday, yesterday, I, I, uh, I, uh, I, I, talked to Mr. Kleindienst. Uh, he, uh, removed himself, uh, from my, uh, some investigation of people that are involved (unintelligible) some case. I directed it, uh, to Petersen. I made a decision on Petersen myself but he wanted a special prosecutor.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: I, I, said alright, we'll go with Petersen, say, that's right Petersen will be with me and Mr. Petersen is in charge of this and so forth and so on. I want Petersen to be able to say what I (unintelligible) that I made the record with him like nobody's business last night.

EHRlichman: Well, he's got every incentive, so.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: Well, now in, in seeing Dean now,...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, but the question is...

EHRlichman: ...I think uh, uh, the point is that in, in, uh, taking these letters from him, uh, it would be the agreement that neither he nor you would announce it immediately.

PRESIDENT: No.

EHRlichman: So the announcement would be in your discretion,...

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: ...and the decision would be in your discretion as to which way you go.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: But that in view -and you might ask him whether he intends to plead guilty or not.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Or...

EHRlichman: Or not guilty, Because that will weigh...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...in your, in your ultimate decision.

PRESIDENT: That's right, that's right.

HALDEMAN: Then we've got a cop out.

EHRlichman: Well, then that will come out.

PRESIDENT: That's right, I'm going to find out (unintelligible) well, let me say that if, if he, if he, uh, he gets a cop out he's gonna, he's gonna be dead. Which really (unintelligible). You can't have him around herewith the kind of stuff he's going to cop out about.

HALDEMAN: Oh, no.

EHRlichman: Ask him what you should say publicly about the Dean report.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. He said, he told me, he says there was no Dean report. I, uh, don't understand it. I think it was -an oral report. I said, didn't I ask you what it's final outcome is? Yes. Didn't you say nobody's involved? Yes, I said was anybody involved? No.

EHRlichman: I see.

PRESIDENT: Well, I went right down the line.

EHRlichman: You thought that, that's all was said.

PRESIDENT: On the part of Ehrlichman, Colson and Dean, I said did you know; he said no. So at least his line on that is that he didn't know about it before, prior knowledge.

EHRlichman: OK.

PRESIDENT: Only one point that, uh, occurs to me that uh, that, uh, he did discuss with me the, this need, for funds for Hunt. At least I remember the...

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Did he come in, who did he discuss that with, (unintelligible) that Hunt needed attorney fees.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: Did he do that to you personally?

PRESIDENT: Yeah. He discussed it and asked about it. I said I

PRESIDENT: don't know whether you can get it. I, I, I,
(Continued) I didn't but, but what I meant is that it
was so, uh --

EHRlichman: Well, you know what I was telling him at the
sa-, at that time,...

PRESIDENT: Uh huhm.

EHRlichman: ...was that that should not be a
consideration in this thing.

PRESIDENT: Uh humm.

ENRlichman: And you know...

PRESIDENT: And then they went back and, and so Mitchell
took care of it, I mean, ah...

EHRlichman: Yeah, but not on, not on account of any
jeopardy to me obviously.

PRESIDENT: Dean -Huh?

EHRlichman: Not on account of any jeopardy to me. I
mean he did that for his own purposes.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Mitchell.

EHRlichman: Yeah. Because I was saying look fellows if,
if that's the only thing he's doing, is
blackmailing me, why forget it, you know.

PRESIDENT: Wait, wait, Hunt sent a message to you. I
didn't know about that.

EHRlichman: No, he didn't send it to me. He sent it to,
to Dean about me.

PRESIDENT: I didn't know that.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: What did he say I'm gonna talk about
Ehrlichman? (unintelligible)

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: He's referring of course to the things that were done before.

EHRlichman: Sure.

HALDEMAN: He said, I, I'm gonna pull the plug on all the dirty stuff.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: He also said something about that.

EHRlichman: Now, also, you know, in thinking about this

PRESIDENT: You told him, you told (unintelligible).
Alright go ahead.

EHRlichman: ...uh, in thinking about this...

PRESIDENT: But who, but, but...

HALDEMAN: John stonewall, stonewalled that completely. (Unintelligible) Dean, he doesn't have anything, there is nothing.

EHRlichman: Uh, do you remember when we were planning the Hawaiian trip. The very active discussion we had about Clark McGregor going out and making a full disclosure on Watergate.

PRESIDENT: Um hmm.

EHRlichman: And we had a plan.

PRESIDENT: Right, that I was, I in on it.

EHRlichman: Well, you were -we discussed with you the possibility. The idea was that you'd be out of town and it wouldn't get on

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: Remember?

PRESIDENT: Uh huh.

EHRlichman: And you know who shot that down?

PRESIDENT: Uh, Dean?

EHRlichman: Dean and McGregor.

HALDEMAN: And McGregor?

EHRlichman: Yeah.

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PRESIDENT: Yeah. Why?

EHRlichman: Because they felt that it would be damaging to the campaign.

PRESIDENT: Oh, we all know that's a phony.

EHRlichman: But, somewhere, I think I did a memo on that and I'm having it looked for now. But, in any event, uh, we made a kind of a full court press at that time. Remember, we were at San Clemente and we were going to have McGregor come out there.

PRESIDENT: Uh huh.

EHRlichman: And we had a lot of conversations on the phone and I blasted him and badgered him and urged him. And he dug his heels in and dug his heels in.

HALDEMAN: At least five times during this period, I would get Dean into my office or he'd come in you know, with his problems and stuff. And we'd go through the whole thing. I spoke to you of this a couple of, of those times at least. I said, "John, why don't you just put the whole thing out and go with it." He said, "Oh no, we can't do that." And he can't -he knows...

PRESIDENT: What is the story behind what happened on that, on that fee for, for representing, the last thing for, for Hunt. Then, I mean, he mentioned it to me and I, I...

EHRlichman: I know, I know none of the facts. Uh, Dean transmitted to me the threat...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: which he had received personally from Bittman and that, and...

PRESIDENT: Right, right. Go ahead, go ahead.

EHRlichman: I said to John, "Look, if, if we're going to live with this..."

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: ...all our lives, the hell with it."

PRESIDENT: Right, good, good, good, then what?

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EHRlichman: So then he went back to Mitchell, apparently, because the next thing I knew about it, we had a meeting in Bob's office about something else and...

PRESIDENT: Mitchell

EHRlichman: Mitchell came in and Mitchell said I've taken care of it.

PRESIDENT: Okay. Now let's see (Unintelligible)

Well, anyway, uh we'll get there
(unintelligible) Henry Petersen
(unintelligible)

This scenario (unintelligible) got to be so
(unintelligible)

SEVERAL (Unintelligible)

VOICES:

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, sir.

HALDEMAN: You bet.

PRESIDENT: And, ah

EHRlichman: Ron's got to have that information.

PRESIDENT: Well, I may have to just say it myself.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: I conducted this

UNIDENTIFIED: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...investigation and so forth.

EHRlichman: (Unintelligible) Petersen standing there right by (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: Right, I can say that the Watergate case has been broken.