



H. R. Haldeman Diaries Collection, January 18, 1969 – April 30, 1973

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Friday, April 20.

The President had me in first thing this morning. Read me a note Julie had written him, a handwritten note, talking about how great he is and the family all stand behind him. We had a quick discussion on Watergate, and the President then had to go into the head, and had me come in with him, well, stand in the hall, and we continued this discussion. Mainly about the need to hunker down following up on last night.

We then went into a Cabinet meeting. He put Ehrlichman in the Vice President's chair as the moderator of the meeting and the general subject of the energy message. Went through, in considerable detail, with Shultz' presentation and the President cutting in on a number of items that are well covered in my notes. Also got into the economy and the President explained that. A lot of discussion also covered in the notes for today.

Then turned to the Watergate. Said you may have wondered why we have not discussed it previously. But we thought we did all we could to get to the bottom of it and had been unable to do so. We've had breaks in the past three weeks. It's now at the grand jury where it should be. It's extremely painful to the President and to Kleindienst. He won't indicate what will happen, but just asks that you don't make up your minds based on the press. The important thing is to get the truth the guilty people tried and convicted the innocent will be cleared. When we met Sunday, Kleindienst suggested that he drop out and the President agreed. Petersen is now in direct contact with the President. He's a career man, honest and is calling the shots. There will be total cooperation from anybody here. You should tell your people to tell the truth. That's the order at the White House staff. We will have a rough time over the next few weeks. It was unbelievable jackassery that happened. What hurt Truman versus Hiss was that he tried to cover-up. We have not. We have tried to get it out. Now we have something, results, and the grand jury has them and they'll indict or not, depending on what happened.

Kleindienst then lobbed in the statistics on what the investigation had covered. The President made the point that the toughest thing is to investigate yourself or your former people. The



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record will show that's what we've done. And we can say that, when we get the facts, this Administration is determined, even when it may be embarrassing, to have justice fall evenly, but don't judge or say anything. Wait for the criminal system to act. Don't go by the *Washington Post*. Individuals involved have an incentive to talk about others in ways that are not true. That is why the grand jury system is set up. It's not a public hearing.

The difficulty with the press the way it is, makes this very hard the transcript of the grand jury proceedings, in a column for instance and on this the President said I don't believe it's a court reporter. Kleindienst lobbed in saying, no, it was a grand juror. The President said no, it can't be, it has to be the prosecutor. Which, of course, Kleindienst was trying to defend. He told everybody to have a good Easter. That he's going to Florida. That he's having the staff stay here with their families. And he said when we think all these things are rough they are, of course but a year from now we'll look back and say what was the issue last year, just as we now look back on Cambodia and May 8 and December. In December, for example, he was almost totally alone except for two people. Everybody else said why not explain? They all said it was terrible. Every POW now says the December bombing is what did it. We've been through some tough ones before, and that's why we're still here.

John and I met with our attorneys right after the Cabinet meeting, and they think it's incongruous for Dean still to be on the staff at the White House. They raised the question with the President making a statement backing Ehrlichman and me, which I don't think he should do. On Haldeman, they say it narrows down to the conversation with Dean on the needs of families and fees. Want me to write precisely, by event, chronologically, how the whole thing developed. Everything I can think of regarding Dean's approaches or anyone else's approaches.

The President had us in at 11:00, said he had talked with Bush. He wants to be helpful but he's a worrywart. He brought up Rietz. He was involved in the dirty tricks department and has hired a lawyer now, because he's into this thing, so Bush is going to fire him. He says 15 people in the White House, past or present, are involved, according to *Newsweek*, who talked to him. Wants to



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know what we do with it the way it's burgeoning. He thinks the President has done the right thing, but needs more and he reflects concern.

The President won't ask Petersen about Hunt's testimony. He feels the critical point now is the Presidential posture and the public perception of it. The President pushed Petersen on speeding the grand jury. Doesn't think it will do any good. They still have only arm's length arrangement with Dean. He thinks we should have a talk with Moore about the La Costa thing. He's Special Counsel to the President and can't reveal conversations.

Dean says no one in the White House is involved. That he's not trying to obstruct justice. He had no exposure himself and no one in the White House. Did not know anybody was obstructing justice. Don't know where that comes from. Dean said that somewhere. Dean told us that Mitchell and LaRue were raising the money, but he had no knowledge of corruption or improper purpose. We had a suspicion, but Dean kept from us any knowledge. This is Ehrlichman's basic outline, I guess.

The President then says I wonder where we stand on "operation surgery". That is, letting us go. Our lawyers convinced the President it's not the right course. He then says, though, if eventually, why not now? Both legally and in the public gray area. The theory is the White House staff has to accept the responsibility as stewards. We argued we should take one step at a time. First, the legal, then the public decision on stepping down, and then the *New York Times* theory on stewardship.

The President left at noon for Key Biscayne. Ehrlichman and I came up to Camp David. Ziegler called tonight to say that he had painfully thought through the whole thing, and especially after watching the news tonight with Mitchell coming out of the grand jury and stonewalling charges and countercharges. He feels that if I'm dragged in, not on a legal basis but public opinion, and this applies to Ehrlichman also, that if we don't move voluntarily to get out front and make it seem voluntary, they will have a very negative impact on me as a man. That he doesn't want to see me as he saw Mitchell tonight. The more I'm weakened by dragging it out, the more it will



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weaken the President. If I take a voluntary leave of absence, that will have a bad impact on the President; but if I'm forced by public opinion to leave later on, that will have a far greater bad impact. So both from the human and Presidency viewpoint, not only considering legal but also public opinion, he thinks I ought to take the leave.

He can't sense the President's mood and tone, although he had to spend a lot of time with him this afternoon after they got to Key Biscayne, and he's had four or five phone calls since. But he says he's moving all over the lot. Buchanan wrote him a memo making the point that those who can't maintain their viability, for their own sake and the President's, should be leaving at their own initiative. Ziegler thinks it is inevitable from a PR standpoint, especially with the Dean factor and Mitchell's decision to stonewall. Even if there is no grand jury action, the PR will drag me down and the President along with me. I should consider a voluntary leave with forceful action afterwards. Not a resignation in any way. Action on my part so as not to burden the Presidency with charges and so on.

If I'm mentioned at the grand jury, the ball game is over. So I should take the leave, clean it up and then come back to work. He also says you've got to consider the President's frame of mind in this. The problem is the timing, and you've got to work it against when you think grand jury findings will come out. I should say that my name is mentioned and that puts me on the defensive. The tough call is when to do it. I go under a stronger negative if it's after my name is raised, than if I go ahead on the high ground and on the offensive. The critical point is timing. The more I'm drawn in, the weaker I become.

He then read me the Buchanan memo, which says in effect the President is out in front now, although it may be too late to move out in front. He must remain there and not be dilatory. No one who is not guilty should be put overboard. However, any aides who can't survive the revelations to come should go sooner, not later. Even now, it can be a selfless act. If it's dragged out, the result will be that they were forced. We may have passed the point for voluntary action. The White House should initiate, not react to grand jury, the Committee and so on. Then this



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piece-by-piece thing should not happen. We should put it out ourselves. We cannot appear to be covering anyone. We have to come clean. No margin for error. He refers to Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs, where he took responsibility. We can't escape damage, and the President can't, but he can be cleared of Watergate. It must be seen-- he must be seen as cleaning our own house, not forced to do it by the press. If I leave without Ehrlichman, then it's still a cover-up. We can't separate, even though I'm out in front. So the two crucial decision points the timing re: the grand jury, which must be ahead. If there's any chance that my name's going to come up, I should go.

End of April 20.