

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A TELEPHONE
CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND JOHN
EHRlichMAN ON APRIL 25, 1973 FROM 7:25 TO
7:39 P.M.

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PRESIDENT: ...please.

OPERATOR: Thank you.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRLICHMAN: Yes sir.

PRESIDENT: I wanted you to know that I just talked to Kleindienst and told him that I wanted him to tell the prosecutor Neison (phonetic) or Nesson (phonetic)...

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: ...or whatever his name is is and, uh, that, that, and, uh, Kleindienst totally agreed that this was--I wanted him to know that this was a national security investigation of great sensitivity and that I, that none of the information had been there but was only presented just so that they would have it in their file and that I would, you know, I said do everything you can to, uh, to see that this is not something that comes out publicly.

EHRLICHMAN: Great.

PRESIDENT: At least I, I don't know whether it'll work or not, but...

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah, that's terrific.

PRESIDENT: I don't know whether it's terrific or not.

EHRLICHMAN: Well, it's the best that can be done.

PRESIDENT: But, uh, you can see, see why, oh, you could say that the lawyer was having a gun at their head.

EHRLICHMAN: Sure, sure.

PRESIDENT: I think he had.

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah. I understand.

PRESIDENT: I think he put it out there solely for the purpose of, uh--Petersen told-me, he says, "I think he put it out there for the purpose of, uh, frankly blackmailing, uh, Henry Petersen and, uh, frankly maybe, uh, the White House."

EHRlichman: Hmm. Interesting. Well, then the best thing to do...

PRESIDENT: What do you think?

EHRlichman: ...is what you did, the very best thing.

PRESIDENT: We are not gonna have any blackmail.

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: And, uh...

EHRlichman: Did he give you any sort of a reading on, uh, timing on Dean?

PRESIDENT: God damn he doesn't know. I uh, I uh, I, he's pushing...

EHRlichman: I can see why if they're playing that kind of a game.

PRESIDENT: Yes, he's waiting for them to come to him, you see.

EHRlichman: Yep, yep, sure.

PRESIDENT: Oh, I might as well tell you, since you haven't talked to Bob yet, that Dean is involved in another one. He probably is gonna be called in the Vesco case. Apparently, it-Is alleged that Dean made a call to, on the Vesco case, to attempt to quash an indictment and they're gonna call him on that damn thing.

EHRlichman: Holy smoke.

PRESIDENT: So he'll be up there before that grand jury too.

EHRlichman: What in the world did he do that for?

PRESIDENT: Probably because Mitchell asked him, I don't know. But, uh, so there's that. Uh, but, uh, the uh, I uh,, just for your own computation and so forth, I'm doing a lot, of, lot of thinking about this and I want you to do a lot too, but I, I told Petersen look, I said, I, uh, -he's getting his, I told you he's getting his paper to me Friday. I told him about the desire to have you people, you and Bob, your preliminary, you know, informal discussion at the earliest poss--(unintelligible) and appear before the Grand Jury. He said well we might have to have them again. I said all right have 'em again, but...

EHRlichman: Fine.

PRESIDENT: ...we're on the offensive here.

EHRlichman: Good.

PRESIDENT: I want to be on the offensive on this thing. You see that's a positive action, too, John.

EHRlichman: Sure, sure.

PRESIDENT: And I said the other, the, uh, the--Dash, Dash has called--oh, that's the other thing I didn't tell Bob. Dash had called him and said that, uh, Dash had called, uh, is trying to get Dean before their committee, see, talked to Dean's counsel and, uh, so, uh, Henry, uh, Petersen is going to try to see Ervin (unintelligible) out of the country on Monday, to try to get that knocked off. But, uh, so, Dean may want to go up there and spill his guts.

EHRlichman: I see.

PRESIDENT: I'm inclined to think with Dean, got to play the string out a little bit. I mean just a bit in terms of seeing just how far he wants to go.

EHRlichman: Well, just keep closing doors on him. Yeah.

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PRESIDENT: And, uh, incidentally, uh, uh, he said the prosecution, which originally was thinking in terms of, you know, uh, possible immunity, has now reached the conclusion that--it's turned around and just, and I mean--I said, "Not because of what I said now Henry," I said, "I want to make it clear, I said any major person is your decision."

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: He said it is their decision and ours...

EHRlichman: Good.

PRESIDENT: ...that they can't do it because of what is involved. I spoke to Kleindienst a bit about the (unintelligible) and he said hell no, he said one thing about (unintelligible) he said the President can't be blackmailed...

EHRlichman: Good.

PRESIDENT: ...uh, and he says and Kleindienst can't be blackmailed, he mentioned himself, and he said Petersen can't be blackmailed because he said Dean can shoot all of them you know. And I think John that's what it gets down to.

EHRlichman: He's been a bit too cute.

PRESIDENT: We're in a fight here where, uh, he tried to blackmail everybody. And uh, and uh...

EHRlichman: I think you did the right thing.

PRESIDENT: Well, the main thing we have done is not to make a precipitate decision about anything.

EHRlichman: Yep, yep.

PRESIDENT: And we're gonna do it in an orderly, right way.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Now the other thing too, I wanted to tell you that on the--I want you to think about this business of the, you know, what we talked about...

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...leave of absence and so forth.

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: I'm not too convinced of that one on Bob, it, it may be, I mean what is there--have you got a minute now?

EHRlichman: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Uh, does the leave of absence thing buy us anything really?

EHRlichman: Well...

PRESIDENT: Maybe.

EHRlichman: ...uh, it depends on who you're talking to. Now, uh, I think, I think Connally's about right on it that, uh, that it's not good but it's also not as bad as a resignation and, uh, and, uh...

PRESIDENT: Right. At least shows you're trying to do something.

EHRlichman: That's right.

PRESIDENT: Basically but, but not for you.

EHRlichman: Well, in time. I think we have to contemplate in due course it'll come but it can't...

PRESIDENT: In due course.

EHRlichman: It's premature right now.

PRESIDENT: No, we can't do it on the basis of what we've got.

EHRlichman: That's it.

PRESIDENT: But if something blew on the, uh, this thing of the, uh...

EHRlichman: Sure. Or if the, the...

PRESIDENT: ...in the Ellsberg...

EHRlichman: ... if the interview with the U.S. Attorney or something of that kind went bad why, uh...

PRESIDENT: That's right. That's right. But, uh, that's all right too. But, uh, the point is the leave of absence doesn't convict anybody.

EHRlichman: That's right.

PRESIDENT: And also it provides the, uh (unintelligible).

EHRlichman: I tell you, I made a mistake, uh, in joining with Bob in retaining counsel.

PRESIDENT: I think you're right. Yeah, because your case is so different from his.

EHRlichman: And, uh...

PRESIDENT: You better change pretty fast.

EHRlichman: If I could, if I can figure out some way of getting a little separation I think it's wise to do.

PRESIDENT: Couldn't agree more. You've gotta do it. You've gotta do it. Because Bob--John, uh, as you know I love you both but boy, uh, staying together you're in a hell of a lot more trouble than if you go separately.

EHRlichman: That's true, that's true.

PRESIDENT: And, uh, and I know your situation and what it is and, and of course Bob's is more difficult.

EHRlichman: It is different.

PRESIDENT: Bob's is a hell of a lot more difficult on two scores, let's fact it. One, the whole business of whether he had information before. That I don't think they can make stick because of...

EHRlichman: I agree.

PRESIDENT: ...Strachan. I think (unintelligible). But second, uh, the money.

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EHRlichman: Yep.

PRESIDENT: The money, uh, specifically is gonna be one son-of-a-bitch.

EHRlichman: Yep, it is.

PRESIDENT: We've gotta face it.

EHRlichman: It is.

PRESIDENT: That there is no way. You're, you're getting-launching Kalmbach and all that sort of thing, uh, so it's dependent to a certain extent on LaRue, too, you know. LaRue, they're now trying to get to plead, and he may, he may plead.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: You know. I mean, look at the poor son-of-a-bitch. I mean he's...

EHRlichman: Well...

PRESIDENT: B-, b-, but, you, you ought to go separately and I would do it soon.

EHRlichman: (Unintelligible) I am pretty wise to that whole operation. LaRue-I don't...

PRESIDENT: Well, the only thing that you, you know that, that they claim--not the LaRue thing, but is to call the Kalmbach, which you've just...

EHRlichman: Oh yeah. Well, that, that my fellows say they can handle.

PRESIDENT: John, I think you can too. Good God, I mean that was purely, was simply humanitarian, basically.

EHRlichman: And, and very perfunctory in the whole chain of circumstances.

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

EHRlichman: Not a proximate cause.

PRESIDENT: See, Dean's (unintelligible) at you basically, lees face it, is with regard to this whole National Security area, isn't it?

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EHRlichman: Well, I'm glad you did what you did.

PRESIDENT: Don't you agree though...

EHRlichman: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: ...that it's National Security area. But, but you mean like on, uh, letting, uh, having Kleindienst do this. Well, I, didn't have any choice, he came in and says, "I've got to do this, Mr. President..."

EHRlichman: I understand.

PRESIDENT: ...I'm sitting on this thing and it's, it's, it's volcanic."

EHRlichman: I understand.

PRESIDENT: I could have said, "Dick, that's National Security, don't pass it on," but if I do it there Dean's got another hammer at our head.

EHRlichman: No. You're quite right.

PRESIDENT: I do, I hope you don't disagree with me.

EHRlichman: Oh, I don't, not at all.

PRESIDENT: I, uh, I had to think--I, my own view is, as I said, I have told Dick to call out there, as I just repeated it to you earlier. Uh, I don't know whether it'll do any good.

EHRlichman: Um hmm.

PRESIDENT: But at least the U.S. Attorney will know...

EHRlichman: OK.

PRESIDENT: ...that, my God, this is a National Security investigation--was--but it didn't produce anything.

EHRlichman: Right. All right sir. See you tomorrow.

PRESIDENT: Let us suppose this.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

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PRESIDENT: Just looking at it, with all of our (unintelligible). You call Dean and then he'll go out there and he'll testify to this. He'll probably say that while he was doing it, as, as he was working in Ehrlichman, under Ehrlichmah's direction, etc. Right? Is that what he'll say?

EHRlichman: Uh...

PRESIDENT: On the Ellsberg, uh...

EHRlichman: I don't think Dean can say that. Uh, they would have to get some other witness, they would have to get Liddy-or Hunt or somebody.

PRESIDENT: To say that they, uh...

EHRlichman: Dean was, Dean was not directly involved.

PRESIDENT: He wasn't?

EHRlichman: No.

PRESIDENT: Then how the hell does he know about this? This is hearsay.

EHRlichman: Snooping over the fence.

PRESIDENT: Oh, I see. Oh, I see. He wasn't an actor in this.

EHRlichman: No, sir.

PRESIDENT: Uh huh. Well, then there it is, he'll just go out and he'll do it in hearsay so uh-if he did, though, would that connect John-- you?

EHRlichman: That's just something we'll have to live with.

PRESIDENT: And we're not gonna die over it.

EHRlichman: No, that's right.

PRESIDENT: If they did what would you say? Wouldn't uh, wouldn't you just, uh...

EHRlichman: Well, I, I'd say what is, what is the fact, that, uh, my connection with it was that I authorized their travel and I authorized them

(EHRlichman:) to go out and investigate Ellsberg and among the things that were to be investigated out there was a, uh, an examination of his medical records if that were possible.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: Now they chose a method that I...

PRESIDENT: You did not approve.

EHRlichman: I did not approve.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: When I heard about it afterwards I disapproved of it.

PRESIDENT: Did you? Yeah.

EHRlichman: And, uh, in my, my shortcoming, my failing, was in not bringing them to account on it and not just having them arrested on you know, on...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...on, uh, on discovery. Since it was a, since it was an...

PRESIDENT: Highly sensitive thing...

EHRlichman: ...military area, why, uh...

PRESIDENT: ...and you could also find out the, uh, Federal Bureau of Investigation at that time--how we can ever get that across--would not or could not, how do we say that? We all know why Hoover didn't do it but, uh...

EHRlichman: Well, uh, that, that, yeah that'd be a part of that, I suppose, but I, here again, I think I'll talk to Wilson about this in the morning so that he's forewarned.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: And he can do some briefing on it.

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PRESIDENT: Well, wait a minute. I don't think there's any, I can see any legal thing here. do you? I mean illegality...

EHRlichman: Well I, as I say, I don't either but I don't know, you know.

PRESIDENT: No, well for Christ sakes, I mean, uh, you didn't authorize any damn break-in or anything of that sort.

EHRlichman: That's right. That's correct.

PRESIDENT: You had nothing to do with that. I don't mean that, I'm referring now to the public thing, John, rather than the...

EHRlichman: Yeah, yeah.

PRESIDENT: No, no you didn't break the damn law, I don't mean that. I meant, uh, I mean, uh, these clowns did a lot of things that you know. You were conducting an investigation into this matter, and you authorized them to go to check with regard to this and that if--you know and the, so forth, but you did not know, did not know, and, in fact, discovered it later.

EHRlichman: Yeah, I was told about it afterward.

PRESIDENT: That's right. Were you told?

EHRlichman: Yes, afterward.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, yeah. And was he retained after that? I guess he was.

EHRlichman: Not very long.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. All right, that's good, that's good. But, let me say, there's nothing legal above it and so forth. But, uh, let's uh, uh, you're, you're uh-but, but, but the other option for us, for me to try to stomp on Kleindienst and, uh, this fellow again, you know, and say, look, this is National Security. You know, I did that tough from Camp David and I think that's about as far as I can go on that.

EHRlichman: Yeah. Well.

PRESIDENT: Or do you agree?

EHRlichman: I think so. I think you've, you've done what you can and should there.

PRESIDENT: If I'd, if I'd told them today look, uh, you cannot use this information, then I think Dean then had another, another club to hit us with.

EHRlichman: Um hum. Right.

PRESIDENT: Or do you agree?

EHRlichman: Yep. Absolutely. Absolutely, I think this opens it up and it, uh...

PRESIDENT: Right now, right now we gotta...

EHRlichman: Let's the fresh air out.

PRESIDENT: Well, not only fresh air, but--you know an interesting thing is that, uh, Petersen's reaction to this, he says, he says the--and I'm so surprised--he says, you know--he didn't know about my, he didn't know at the time, I told him I'd talked to Kleindienst, but what the talk was about--and he says, you know, he says, "I think Dean's attorneys made a terrible mistake in, uh, putting this out to us," and "Why do you think it was a mistake?" He said, "Because they were trying to test us, they were trying to see if we got this information, they, they didn't think we'd use it."

EHRlichman: Hmm.

PRESIDENT: And they, uh, they didn't and they thought they would hold that over our heads.

EHRlichman: Um hmm.

PRESIDENT: we had this information with regard to this illegal break-in and did not use it in the Ellsberg case. I think he has a good point there.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

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PRESIDENT: Or do you agree?
EHRlichman: Yeah, yeah I do.
PRESIDENT: And he said...
EHRlichman: It takes all the poison out of it, by, uh...
PRESIDENT: Yeah, takes the poison out and also puts Dean in a position where he doesn't have that, uh, where he can't say that well, uh, we, uh, stopped the Na--stopped the investigation which was illegal.
EHRlichman: Um hmm. Um hmm. Yep.
PRESIDENT: But anyway, okay.
EHRlichman: All right, sir.
PRESIDENT: And stand firm.
EHRlichman: Right. See you tomorrow.
PRESIDENT: Keep cool.
EHRlichman: Fine.