

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A MEETING AMONG THE PRESIDENT,
JOHN EHRLICHMAN, RONALD ZIEGLER IN THE OVAL OFFICE ON MARCH
30, 1973 FROM 12:02 TO 12:18 P.M.

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THE PRESIDENT, JOHN EHRLICHMAN, RONALD
ZIEGLER, IN THE OVAL OFFICE, ON MARCH 30,
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EHRLICHMAN: (Unintelligible) (Loud Noise) We have, I think, a useful statement that has been cleared by Dean and Mitchell and, uh, is directed to the cover-up charge.

(Pause)

PRESIDENT: Do you want me to read it?

ZIEGLER: I think you probably better.

PRESIDENT: I can read it (Unintelligible) (Loud noise) discussing what's happened to him. Or do you want to read it?

ZIEGLER: No. (Loud noise) Well, it's not a statement, Mr. President, it's some talking points for me.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. OK.

EHRLICHMAN: The brackets at the top go to the end.

(35 Second Pause)

PRESIDENT: Could we say--could we add one thing here? Save this for the last. Every--I called for an investigation which the White House staff conducted on Watergate4 And uh, uh, every--and for every--this is a statement of the President?

ZIEGLER: No. No. It, I would almost...

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Yeah. The President called for--fine. Every member of the White House staff who has been mentioned prior (unintelligible) mentioned as a--has submitted a sworn affidavit, to me, denying any knowledge of --any prior knowledge of, any knowledge of or participation in the--. Could we say this?

EHRlichman: (Draws breath). No--I wouldn't.

PRESIDENT: Why? Not true.

ZIEGLER: Too defensive.

EHRlichman: Well, number one, it's defensive, it's self-serving. But number two, then that establishes the existence of a piece of paper that becomes a focal point for a subpoena and all that kind of thing.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)) civil record, or something) (20 Second Pause) Members of the White House, uh, would welcome an opportunity to (unintelligible). (Pause). Are we going too far? Urging the Grand Jury to do it?

EHRlichman: Well, that's, we were farther over and we've come back to welcome. I don't know. Maybe that's still too strong.

ZIEGLER: We should tell the President about the, the, framework which we'll be giving this. There's a leak out of the, the Committee

PRESIDENT: Oh.

ZIEGLER: ...for the Re-election of the President and the suggestion that you have waived, uh, the, the, uh, uh...

PRESIDENT: Watergate (unintelligible).

ZIEGLER: ...restriction on, on, Dean being--

EHRlichman: The Dean, the Dean thing. See, we cleared it with, uh, uh, Mitchell once and cleared it with...

ZIEGLER: Magruder.

EHRlichman: ...and Dean's lawyer. And uh, uh, Dean thinks it was Magruder that leaked it.

PRESIDENT: Members of the White House staff
(Pause)-well, (15 second pause) I don't know whether you can say would welcome the opportunity. Why don't you say, members of the White House staff uh, will, will, will appear, before the Grand Jury, in person, at any time the jury feels it's relevant, and furnish any information regarding the individual's alleged knowledge.

EHRlichman: You see what I mean? I don't think you see the welcome.

PRESIDENT: Will appear--will appear before the Grand Jury if the jury feels it is relevant. Furnish any information of an individual's alleged knowledge. (10 second pause). Have you got it in again?

ZIEGLER: Well, except for that, it is only for me, as a talking piece.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Have you had it? If, if the Grand Jury feels it's relevant, members of the White House staff, by direction of the President, will--will appear before the Grand Jury. Listen, I think that's a little better than the idea that members of the White House staff would welcome. Don't you think so, John?

ZIEGLER: By direction of the President.

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: By direction of the President will appear before the Grand Jury and furnish any information, regarding that individual's alleged-I like that a little better.

EHRlichman: OK.
(10 Second Pause)

PRESIDENT: I would say-it is not the objective of the White House other than to draw a curtain down over this matter, to, to cover up this matter, to cover up this mess, and to withhold any information. (35 second pause). Why don't we say that we wish to differ from-there are, of course, other informal moves that could be attained. We are ready, we are ready to, state uh, uh, state uh, uh, we, uh, uh, we are ready to discuss those procedures with the, with-the Committee. (Unintelligible) and we; we are ready to cooperate with the Committee, to, uh, work out, uh, the procedure (Pause) to work out a proper procedure--be proper to work out a proper procedure. How's that, John? Is that all right?

EHRlichman: Fine. You want to say, we, we continue to be ready?

PRESIDENT: I'll just say, we are ready--let's, that's a little, let's get a little movement.)

EHRlichman: All right.

PRESIDENT: We are ready--we are ready to work out, to work out.

EHRlichman: That's right.

PRESIDENT: Let them see that we are backing down a bit.

EHRlichman: All right.

PRESIDENT: Ready to work.

ZIEGLER: And then who should we get to say this.

PRESIDENT: We get--

ZIEGLER: (Unintelligible.)

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) office.

EHRlichman: Well, now, you've given Kleindienst the franchise.

PRESIDENT: Yep.

EHRlichman: Uh, uh, you, we've gotta get word to him which we were going to do Saturday, because we were going to shift, shift the gun.

ZIEGLER: Let's say--

PRESIDENT: We are ready, we are ready--

EHRlichman: We'll say the, the, uh--

PRESIDENT: Let's leave it with the Timmons' office.

EHRlichman: Well, why say it?

PRESIDENT: Yeah, just say it, well with members, the appropriate members of the staff.

EHRlichman: Why, why not say this? This is going to be done without publicity.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: And---

PRESIDENT: No. It's going to be done informally without publicity--by, uh, whatever--

EHRlichman: Period.

PRESIDENT: This will be done informally. All right.

ZIEGLER: We can do it, but we just have one problem to dwell on. If you give the name, like if you say...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

ZIEGLER: ...well Timmons' office would be...

PRESIDENT: That's right. Then they go after him.

ZIEGLER: ... prepared to do that. Then--no--then you do solidify your point, you see.

EHRlichman: Yeah, but the problem is, that there's always, there's already a lot of complaint on the Committee, and particularly with Baker, that there's too many people running this show.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: And if we introduce Timmons or we introduce somebody else--

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Don't give them a name. The, uh, the, uh, why don't you just say the President will, uh, name a, no--

EHRlichman: You could go this far.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: You could say we've been in touch with the Committee.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Yes.

EHRlichman: And, uh--

ZIEGLER: Have you?

EHRlichman: Yeah, I've talked to Baker.

PRESIDENT: We've been, we've been in communication, uh, with, uh, members, uh, of the--no--well, then you see--

ZIEGLER: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: In fact, you've only been in touch with one member.

EHRlichman: Well, why don't you say communications have been opened and will proceed.

PRESIDENT: Communications have been opened, uh, with, uh, members of the Committee. What members? That's--I'm not going to discuss that. I can't go into that. This, the, communications have been opened with, with, the Committee--why don't you say with the Committee, Committee, communications are handled with the Committee to, uh, for the purpose of working out, a, a, proper informal procedure.

(Pause)

ZIEGLER: And that has taken place?

EHRlichman: Yeah. I talked to Baker yesterday.

PRESIDENT: That's right. Well, we've had lots of talks with him. He talked to Baker at length, Ervin's gone. Is that all right, John?

ZIEGLER: If I could say, ya know, how much--

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: You see, we got an Attorney General problem.

PRESIDENT: We got, we got Kleindienst.

EHRlichman: Let's, let's not force this.

ZIEGLER: All right.

EHRlichman: If you want to, you can say, well I may have some, something more to say about this later.

PRESIDENT: Damn well, just, just say, I'm not going to discuss it because these, these, are there are informal negotiations at this point--an informal discussion might take place at this point.

ZIEGLER: Right.

PRESIDENT: As soon as something is formalized we will let you know.

ZIEGLER: Good.

PRESIDENT: That's, 'cause that's really true, and, and, since something, if something is worked out, we'll let you know--the formal, some informal discussions have already taken place. That's right--some informal discussions. I'm not going to go into the, the--

ZIEGLER: All right--I've got it.

PRESIDENT: How's that? (15 second pause). Oh, it'll be a little long. (15 second pause). The democratic of our judicial system. You might say of our system. Don't you think so?

EHRlichman: I, uh,-Read the phrase.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. It is our position today and in the past that if these charges are to be tested it should be done within the legitimate framework of our judicial system. Don't you think so?

EHRlichman: That takes it out of the Congress then.

ZIEGLER: But the legislative--

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Well, then, just say system. And you don't, and then you're not using the last--the bracketed thing at all?

EHRlichman: The bracket at the top goes at the end where he says, uh--

ZIEGLER: Not going to apply it specifically. But he's referring to the bracket at the end.

EHRlichman: No. No. We're not going to use that.

PRESIDENT: You're not going to use that?

EHRlichman: No. It's got a lot of problems associated with it.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Because you're taking the Committee on.

EHRlichman: Yeah. Well, we worked with a lot of different variations of that and, uh, just decided really it was better to leave it out.

ZIEGLER: Give the Committee--and give the Committee back into the (Unintelligible) a start thereby saying (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I question. (Pause) I don't know, well, anyway it's all right. (Loud Noise) Do you think it helps some?

EHRlichman: I think it does. And, and I think--

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

EHRlichman: Ron's trying to get some questions, Ron's going to get up there. Well, Ron, you're not going to apply this to specific instances. What are you trying to say to us? And he again could come back and say, what I am saying to you is that the mistake that people are making, there's a mistaken impression that the White House is trying to cover up in this matter--is just a mistake.

PRESIDENT: Listen, I, I, I'd almost start this statement-I just want to lay to rest, uh, what I, what I think is a, what is a, a, I'm not making any charges of how it happened. I want to lay to rest a massive, uh, uh, uh, uh, misapprehension that has been created in the press, uh, created in the country, uh, with regard to the White House position, uh, uh, on the Watergate matter. Uh, the aftermath. That is, that because of, uh, uh, because of our, uh, and that is, uh, we are attempting, the position is to withhold information and to cover up, this is totally true--you could. say that this is totally untrue. I think I'd start right out that massive misapprehension and so forth and so on. (Pause)

ZIEGLER: Cover up and withhold information.

PRESIDENT: Cover up--withhold information.

ZIEGLER: And then bang into it.

EHRlichman: Mmmm, huh.

ZIEGLER: But (unintelligible). Part of the case is built on the fact the fellows left this room and your press reports is not the place to work this out.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Yeah. That's it exactly.

EHRlichman: And our refusal to--our refusal to try this case in the newspapers...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...has lead to--

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Yeah. Now, I'd say our, our, now, a part of that, I must say, due to the fact our refusal to try the case in the newspapers uh, to try this matter in the newspapers, and uh, the position, uh, of, of, of, uh, maintaining the constitutional, the President's necessity of maintaining the constitutional separation of powers. But, as the President, I'd say, as the President made crystal clear in his press conference on August second, the purpose of his, insistence on the separation of powers is not to cover up. There will be total coop, and complete cooperation with the agencies of government, the uh, to uh, to uh, get at the facts. And the facts can be obtained and still maintain the principle of separation of powers. And all the facts can be obtained. Something like that's--

EHRlichman: That's in there I think pretty good.
(Loud Noise)

PRESIDENT: You don't want to make a sworn statement, huh?

EHRlichman: I would just as soon not. I, uh, think we are better off not, oh, doing up a stream. Look at the-

PRESIDENT: The only position that I am concerned about is this. I wonder if you could take whatever Ron says and--

EHRlichman: We're going to hypo it. We're going to get it around.

PRESIDENT: Get it to the Congress.

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: Get it to the--George Bush.

EHRlichman: Right. I'm going to see the guys that are going to do that and (tape noise) I'll do it now.

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PRESIDENT: All right, fine. If you could work on that between now and three o'clock I think it would be very helpful.

EHRlichman: I shall.

PRESIDENT: Fine. You work on it and I'll take off (unintelligible).

(Noise)