

TRANSCRIPT OF A MEETING AMONG THE PRESIDENT,
H.R. HALDEMAN AND JOHN EHRLICHMAN ON APRIL
20, 1973 FROM 12:16 TO 12:34 P.M.

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UNKNOWN: ...anxious

PRESIDENT: Any further thoughts about this?

EHRLICHMAN: We just had a counsel cogitator and they're getting down to the, down to the head hunt, the heavy golfing now....

PRESIDENT: Christ, I hope not.

EHRLICHMAN: ...and, uh, they feel strongly that we should voluntarily go down for informal conferences if the U.S. Attorney wants us, and so we, we Ill be doing that, I guess.

PRESIDENT: Whatever you -but you make the move yourself?

EHRLICHMAN: They may have left an arrangement with the U.S. Attorney that when, as, and if he wants us, he will phone then, and we will just go down on our own motive.

PRESIDENT: Or you would not.

HALDEMAN: And, uh, we will probably

PRESIDENT: But, you will not try to accelerate that?

EHRLICHMAN: Well, we're gonna try, we, we're gonna try and get ready first.

HALDEMAN: He, yeah, but he said could not accelerate that...

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Yeah. That was his first (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: And fine...

HALDEMAN: Now, we probably do it in a neutral place...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...rather than at their office.

PRESIDENT: Right, right. Uh, oh, good, uh, wait a minute, Bush, of course, is letting Reitz go. And I said to him, uh, that's a stupid thing to do. I said well we (unintelligible) Of course, Bush, I suppose, is the school of people who let everybody go.

EHRlichman: Mr. Clean.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: Of course, Reitz isn't his guy. Jesus Christ.

PRESIDENT: I don't (unintelligible) He said Reitz is involved with money too somewhere.

HALDEMAN: Oh, really.

PRESIDENT: No, no, no, God damn it. God damn it. What I meant is in the handling of the, the money to these people apparently, or something like that. Do you know anything about the Reitz...

EHRlichman: I know, I know a little bit about it, and that's the Muskie chauffeur.

HALDEMAN: Reitz was in that?

EHRlichman: Yep.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Well, nothing wrong with that.

EHRlichman: And, he did -Muskie's chauffeur worked for no money. He worked on the loyalty, but, uh, uh, they did give him some expenses for some things that had to be done and I guess...

HALDEMAN: What the world is wrong with that?

EHRlichman: I don't know, this, this seems to me to be over-reacting.

HALDEMAN: If Manolo went over to the Democratic National Committee and said Id like to tell you what the President's up to and they said fine, tell us, what's wrong with that? From their viewpoint it's wrong to know...

PRESIDENT: Somebody comes in and volunteers, they're gonna take it. If they volunteered Jack Anderson--gonna criticize (unintelligible) they volunteered anybody else. There it is, that's the real one.

HALDEMAN: Reitz.

PRESIDENT: I asked them about it. I talked to Petersen about the idea of John's speeding up the Grand Jury. He says, Christ, there's nothing we'd like to do better, but he says we've got a hell of a problem because each person talks about somebody else, and they give it to somebody else then, and we got to read the record, and I says well, (unintelligible) the longer this thing goes on, the more leaks out, the more innocent people will be indebted, and so forth and so on.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

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PRESIDENT: But, I don't know, I don't know if that's good or not. Yeah, I think it's the victims...

EHRlichman: Well I understand, but I think it would be just a matter of letting him know that you were in a hurry, and then periodically keeping the heat on him.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: So that he doesn't--the thing to fear here is that Silbert will deliberately try to stretch this thing out, hoping for some kind of a, an apple to fall off the tree.

HALDEMAN: They're convinced that's what he's doing.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: So is Colson.

PRESIDENT: Yep. Is Colson involved in the Reitz thing, is that what this is?

EHRlichman: No. Not to my knowledge. That was a Magruder operation.

PRESIDENT: Well, Magruder was the one that's talked about it.

HALDEMAN: Yeah--that's a separate from, uh

PRESIDENT: They, uh, they, uh, they, uh, they, they say they have Magruder and he's talking and so forth, and someone's cooperated but they haven't--they said we still only have an arm's length arrangement with Dean, and the arrangement, so I...

EHRlichman: Dean's just changed the terms.

PRESIDENT: Changed the terms?

EHRlichman: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: Why, I wonder?

EHRlichman: Uh, probably because these guys didn't deliver what they said they would. He's got a guy who's Humphrey's field director in '68.

PRESIDENT: Jesus Christ.

HALDEMAN: Well, (unintelligible) who that would be-his former co-brother-in-law...

EHRlichman: Who is married to the sister...

HALDEMAN: He's cousins of the sister of Dean's first wife.

PRESIDENT: Well, I just hope the poor son-of-a-bitch is not gonna turn him completely rat but that's, uh, what, what Dean is gonna try to negotiate now I don't know. But, Christ, I think he must have--It seems to me he's told them whatever he can so far. Don't you think Dean has?

EHRlichman: It'll sound like it to me if he is into that Hunt business. That's pretty far.

PRESIDENT: Where the hell he get that? Where else could he have gotten that stuff?

EHRlichman: We know that's where it came from I think. Uh, uh, something on that point. Mr. Wilson's just now talking about whether Dean's situation here was difficult or not, and it's his judgment that we are not to disserve him at this point.

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PRESIDENT: I agree. I told Petersen that, I said I was not gonna do a thing about Dean, treat him like anybody else--that's that. If he does not agree with the idea that he should be gone and so forth. Dean has not yet cooperated, you know what I mean.

HALDEMAN: You got one sticky wicket there. Dean is, has the administrative responsibility for the Secret Service, who in the Technical Security Division had the responsibility for all document protection and, and, uh, White House guards.

PRESIDENT: Well?

HALDEMAN: Des-, destruction of confidential trash.

PRESIDENT: Well, let me say this, we also have, though, a top flight fellow that's from the White House detail.

UNKNOWN ENTERS

UNKNOWN: I heard the helicopter will be here shortly. You indicated earlier that you wanted to see Dick Moore.

PRESIDENT: Huh?

UNKNOWN: He's with Mr. Ziegler right now.

PRESIDENT: Oh, I see, yeah. Well, I'll let you know.

UNKNOWN: Fine.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, uh, that's, uh...

HALDEMAN: Well, the White House...

PRESIDENT: Let me ask you this...

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HALDEMAN: The White House detail doesn't come under that, we're not talking about that. We're talking about Technical Security Division.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Which is a different matter, and the Executive Protection Service.

PRESIDENT: Dean's just busy with other things and that you want to handle it another way. You can do that.

HALDEMAN: That'll send a signal to Dean.

PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think its that much of a problem.

(Unintelligible with background noise, two minutes/**REMOVED**)

PRESIDENT: Let me say on the Moore (unintelligible) I would enjoy a frank talk with him about La Costa. There's no reason why we can't. We ought to tell Moore this (unintelligible) the Special Counsel to the President (unintelligible) and basically we simply can't con firm (unintelligible). Of course, I talked to Petersen today about Dean's relationship. I said, "After all, Dean's a counsel" and I said, "yes he does have to * testify with regard to the commission of a crime."

EHRlichman: I'm sure that's so. His own acts--sure.

PRESIDENT: His own acts for the information with regard to others who have been involved.

HALDEMAN: ...except his clients.

EHRlichman: ...except his clients.

HALDEMAN: But there you are.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) his client is not, I figure, is not a member of the White House staff.

EHRlichman: Well, is the client's (unintelligible) not part of the client when acting upon it, uh, on behalf of the client?

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HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) Don't you think you could have a little talk with Dick on that point (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: Hmm.

PRESIDENT: Wonder if he's out there now.

EHRlichman: I wish I talked to him last week. I can't very well now, I don't think. I think you could now.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: And I wish you could pass a message for me.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: Which is this--that, that, my, at least, my recollection of La Costa was that you gave us the responsibility, Bob and me, for producing

PRESIDENT: A paper.

EHRlichman: ...a paper, on the whole Watergate episode that, that was a, we got them out there...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: ...to aid in developing that document...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: ...that we came back to you afterwards and said we can't.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: And my very vivid present recollection is that Dean was the major impeditor to getting that done because of his blocking lines of, lines of, possible bulk.

PRESIDENT: All that's covered (unintelligible)

EHRlichman: That the money business was nothing new. Uh, Dean continually, through this period of time, was coming to us on an episodic basis and saying, Jesus, Mitchell needs money and what are we gonna do? And invariably and inevitably, with the exception of the one little--of the Herb Kalmbach episode...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, he said that.

EHRlichman: ...we said John, God only knows what he's gonna do. And my remark about Nelson Rockefeller is typical.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: You know. Tell Mitchell to go borrow it from his friend Nelson Rockefeller.

PRESIDENT: That's right. Okay, I guess (unintelligible) with that. I think the other, uh, (unintelligible) uh. All right. I call (unintelligible) and Moore on that.

EHRlichman: See, our, our sense of this is, throughout, was Dean saying to us nobody in the White House is involved.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: And our sense of it being, well look if Mitchell needs money, for whatever reason, that's Mitchell's problem.

PRESIDENT: We were not, uh, basically trying to obstruct justice ourselves.

EHRlichman: Nothing...

PRESIDENT: We had knowledge of the subject.

EHRlichman: I have, I have no interest for instance, in obstructing justice.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: I had no exposure myself, I was satisfied from Dean that no, none of my colleagues in the White House had exposure and that Jeb Magruder was a horse's ass and got himself into this.

PRESIDENT: I suppose you'd say, morally, that a member of the White House staff, uh, found Magruder, found somebody else to obstruct the justice sure would (unintelligible)

EHRlichman: Absolutely, absolutely.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) to the prosecutor.

EHRlichman: No, no question about it.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) could say that.

EHRlichman: I have no evidence of that. I, I did not. I, I had no evidence that anybody, until I entered this thing 30th of March, I had no evidence that any lawyer had induced any defendant to say anything but what's true.

PRESIDENT: In other words, the purpose...

HALDEMAN: Still don't know whether (unintelligible) Dean. (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: The purpose as I understand that's the condition. I want you, I said I will grant at this time.

EHRlichman: Correct.

PRESIDENT: Mitchell's obviously has got some line to Magruder. Somebody--he said I'm not gonna ask Petersen (unintelligible). But the line, marking has got to be we've got to have a line (unintelligible) involved, which is true. That is, that "the line's chief purpose, is to take of defendants and everything else.

EHRlichman: Well--

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: Well, in all candor. Uh, I knew that Mitchell was trying to raise money for these people.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: And I knew that LaRue was and I knew that 'cause Dean told me so.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: But, Uh, I don't have any personal knowledge either from Dean or anybody else of any correction in that process.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: Now, uh, I could raise an inference.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: You know, but, but bear in mind I didn't...

PRESIDENT: You didn't have any reason to think of it being raised for an improper purpose until-two things, one until McCord said it was for payoff purposes and two, until Dean came in (unintelligible) and said that Hunt is shaking us down.

EHRlichman: Bob and I have shared a suspicion that Mitchell was at the bottom of all this--

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: There's no two ways about that.

PRESIDENT: That's right. Right.

EHRlichman: And we've shared that suspicion for many months.

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: But Dean, very effectively...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...kept between me...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...and any intimate knowledge...

PRESIDENT: Good

EHRlichman: ...of that whole business...

PRESIDENT: Good, but, uh, one other situation, uh, uh, the other, the other situation that you've got to think about is to-perennial one we have here a, where we stand on a, uh, uh, do uh, what they call operation surgery. Uh, your lawyers, and our lawyers, these lawyers in the situation of operation surgery to correct a wrongdoing, uh, and got to have (unintelligible) Which you, which you think--I suppose, uh, if you want more out of it you'll have to do it eventually, why not now? That's the thing to look out for.

HALDEMAN: If you accept eventually that I would do it, why not now?

PRESIDENT: That's right. Exactly--that's why you've got to get in with your lawyers on, if they let you...

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Then, incidently, you've got to think of your lawyers (unintelligible) to. There are two levels, one legal and two, uh, the gray area.

HALDEMAN: Well, I--

PRESIDENT: The gray area is God-damn tight.

EHRlichman: There's a third...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: There's a third level to this that's developing now in the press, particularly that's developing in the New York Times this morning and that is even if there is no complicity...

PRESIDENT: All right.

EHRlichman: ...the White House staff has to bear responsibility to the President for having permitted this thing to have occurred...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...generally, this is a matter of stewardship...

PRESIDENT: Right.

EHRlichman: ...and that their, their managerial capacity is seriously in question, has been put in question by this whole chain of events, assuming...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) You're gonna argue it, is that all right?

EHRlichman: Well, I think it's gonna be a dull ache all through this thing you're gonna hear it, and, uh, and, uh...

PRESIDENT: You, you think you, you can easily discard it.

EHRlichman: I think, uh, something you ought to give some thought to as to whether we can or not. I don't know, I mean I just noticed it this morning for the first time and I don't have

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: If you start into that then you're saying that we have to accept responsibility for the commission of the Watergate and for anything else that may ever develop that the campaign did.

EHRlichman: Well, I...

HALDEMAN: That's wrong.

EHRlichman: I don't know for (unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: We had clear and specific responsibilities in certain areas. I reviewed advertising, they couldn't run an ad, until I signed off on it. They couldn't publish a position paper or a document on issues until John signed on it, uh, but I had no authority over the budget...

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: I had no authority over the field organization or Personnel hiring or firing, uh, over political strategy, policy, telephone operations.

PRESIDENT: No. Well, let me say this...

HALDEMAN: Or anything else...

PRESIDENT: You got to take one step at a time. The first step is to do exactly what you're doing.

HALDEMAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: The lawyers--what the hell, where you're gonna come out.

HALDEMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: The second step then is to talk about this, the area about, uh, what type depending on what your lawyers do with it eventually, or eventually, why not now (unintelligible). And third area is your, your, your kind of considering and so on, my own point. I don't buy any of it except the first one, the first one, of course, uh, I mean eventually why not now. I mean if it's clear better than an even chance it's gonna move certain directions and I think it's well to not--

HALDEMAN: Absolutely.

PRESIDENT: That's your theory too, isn't it, John?

EHRlichman: Absolutely, absolutely. Well and that, uh, that's gonna be an evaluation we ought to make every day.

PRESIDENT: Day to day.

EHRlichman: Every day will be different.

PRESIDENT: Day to day. Still won't know what, what the God-damned case is about...

EHRlichman: Still don't.

PRESIDENT: Well, I think that's such a silly thing. It's a-well, the lawyers don't know. I didn't ask Petersen. I don't think I'm gonna ask him about this.

EHRlichman: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: Should we?

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EHRlichman: It's very helpful to our guys-uh, uh some of these things, uh, are, are and to the extent that you can that's helpful, but, uh. All right. I understand.

PRESIDENT: Grand Jury (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: Be sure (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: Oh, he did, I just called him today.

HALDEMAN: Just give us a call if (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: On La Costa, I think maybe I'll just, uh, is Moore out here? Yeah, yeah.
(Unintelligible) He wants you to go on with him. Good. Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED: Have a good journey. Good luck.

PRESIDENT: Now, look you (unintelligible), I wish you would go to Camp David (unintelligible). A great man with the great men.
(Unintelligible)