

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A MEETING
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT, H.R. HALDEMAN,
JOHN EHRLICHMAN AND RONALD ZIEGLER,
THE OVAL OFFICE, APRIL 17, 1973, FROM
12:35 TO 2:20 P.M.

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HALDEMAN: Yes, but even Ehrlichman, which he already admits he doesn't have a case on - Petersen thought he had significance.

PRESIDENT: Well, we got in deep. He says that, he says that, legally, yes he does. In, in, in the case of Haldeman, it'll I discuss-- the Strachan things have been determined from a lot to do with with, uh, with, uh, what Strachan says and what Kalmbach says, you know, uh, it's a 350 thing and th, that sort of thing.

HALDEMAN: Kalmbach has no relation to me on that.

EHRLICHMAN: That ah --

PRESIDENT: Have you thought when you say before it gets to the tangential thing out of the way. Have you given any thought to what the line ought to be - I, I don't mean a lie - but a line, on raising the money for these defendants? Because both of you were aware that was going on, you see - the, the raising of money - you were aware of it, right?

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: And you were aware - You see, you can't go in and say I didn't know what in hell he wanted the 350 for. You could say, uh -

HALDEMAN: No - I've given a great dead of thought. I've got what I've written down.

UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Well, I wonder. I'm not, I'm not, I'm not - look - I'm, I'm concerned about the legal thing, Bob, and so forth. Uh, what - You, you say that our purpose was to keep them from talking to the press.

EHRlichman: Well, that was my purpose, I, uh, uh - And before I get too far out on that, uh, I want to talk to an attorney and find out what the law is - which I have not yet done.

PRESIDENT: Right!

HALDEMAN: That's just what I want to do too. Uh, this is...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: ...only a draft.

PRESIDENT: That's right. Well, good. The only point is I, I think it's not only that but, you, you see that involves all of our people.

HALDEMAN: That's what, that's what I feel - it involves Kalmbach -

UNIDENTIFIED: Well.

PRESIDENT: And as to what the hell Kalmbach was told.

EHRlichman: Mr. President, uh, when: when the...

PRESIDENT: I (unintelligible).

EHRlichman: ...truth and fact of this is known, that building next door is full of people who knew that money was being raised for these people.

PRESIDENT: EOB?

EHRlichman: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: Yup.

EHRlichman: Just full of them.

PRESIDENT: Many who knew, but there were not so many actors. In other words, there's a difference between actors and novices.

EHRlichman: Okay. Well, apparently not, because I'm not an actor, uh -

HALDEMAN: Neither am I. The question there is the testimony, I suppose.

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HALDEMAN,
EHRlichMAN, And
THE PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)...ask Dean the question
what his conversation with the
President--but he can use it with the press.
That's all I care about.

EHRlichMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: That's what we have to do (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: Yeah, but, but, boy, he's just gotta be
totally without honor (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: The background involving what, maybe...

HALDEMAN: You have to sink awful low before you get to
that.

PRESIDENT: Talked to the President about, uh \$127,000
we had to get or we were getting so much. I
don't know how that, why it was at that
point that we were still working on money
for Hunt, what, what was it we were, I don't
know how the hell (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: That was the, that was the one that, that
Bittman got to Dean on...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, Dean told...

HALDEMAN: ...directly. And that he really panicked on
it. He was very concerned...

PRESIDENT: He came in and told me.

HALDEMAN: ...professed to be concerned because
Bittman's threat was that Hunt said that "If
you don't get it to me, I'm going to tell
them all about, all about the seamy things I
did for Ehrlichman and when Dean..."

PRESIDENT: That's right

HALDEMAN: And when Dean hit Ehrlichman on that, Ehrlichman's immediate reaction was let him go ahead, I have, there's nothing he can hang me on.

PRESIDENT That's right.

HALDEMAN: Dean didn't want that answer, and went, went on worrying about the money.

PRESIDENT: Told me about it.

HALDEMAN: Told you about it, told me about it and the whole point, I was in here when he told you.

PRESIDENT: Well, ah, good. What, what did we say? Remember he said, "How much is it going to cost to keep these three guys?" He said, "A million dollars." I just shook my head.

HALDEMAN: Then we got into the question, if there's, if there's blackmail here, then we're into a thing that's...

PRESIDENT: All right.

HALDEMAN: ...just ridiculous and he said, he raised the point. Now my feeling on that point remember that, that, Jesus, you can't say it's a million dollars. It may be 10 million dollars.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: Once we get into that.

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

HALDEMAN: And that we...

PRESIDENT: Ought to...

HALDEMAN: That we ought not to be in this and then we left it, you know, we can't do anything about it anyway. We don't have any money, and ah, it isn't a question to be directed here. This is something, relates to Mitchell's problem. Ehrlichman has no problem with the thing with Hunt. And Ehrlichman said, "Christ, if you're going to get into blackmail, the hell with it."

PRESIDENT: Good. The word blackmail, thank God you were in there when it happened, but you remember the conversation.

HALDEMAN: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: I didn't tell him to go get the money, did I?

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: No, you didn't, you didn't either, did you?

HALDEMAN: Absolutely not. I said, "You've got to talk to Mitchell, this is something you got to work out with Mitchell, not here, there's nothing we can do about it here."

PRESIDENT: I think we've got a pretty good record on that one, John, at least.

HALDEMAN: Ah, but there's a couple of complications he can throw in there (unintelligible) which would be of concern, but I just can't conceive that a guy, he may, I can see him using it as a threat. I cannot see him sinking low enough to use that. I, I just, although I must admit the guy has really turned into an unbelievable disaster for us.

PRESIDENT: Yes.

HALDEMAN: But I can't, people don't, he's not un-American and anti-Nixon. I'll tell you what he did, I'll tell you during that period.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: he busted his ass trying to work this out, and it wore him to a frazzle , and I think it probably wore him past the point of rationality. I think he may now be in, a mental state that's causing him to do things that' that ah, when he sobers up, he's going to be very disturbed about with himself.

PRESIDENT: Also, he's probably got a very, very clever new lawyer named Shaffer. I think that's part of the problem.

HALDEMAN: Could very well be.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: Could very well be. But John, I can't believe is a basically dishonorable guy. I think there's no question John is a strong self-promoter, self-motivated guy for his own good, bud ah.

PRESIDENT: Yet in that conversation. I, we were I was very, I said, "Well for Christ's sake--but ah."

HALDEMAN: You explored in that conversation the possibility of whether such kinds of money could be raised. You said, "Well, Christ, we ought to be able to raise money."

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: How much money is involved and he said, "Well, it could be a million dollars over the next year."

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: I said, That's ridiculous. You can't say a million maybe you say a million, it may be 2 or 10, and, ah."

PRESIDENT: But then we got into the blackmail.

HALDEMAN: You said, "Once you start down the path with blackmail, and ah, it's constant escalation, and--

PRESIDENT: Yeah, yeah. That's my only...

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: ...conversation with regard to that.

HALDEMAN: They could jump and then say to us, "Well that was morally wrong." What you should have said is "Blackmail is wrong, not that it's too costly."

PRESIDENT: Oh, well, at that point that we got into (unintelligible) we went into the investigation.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible) that's right.

PRESIDENT: You see my point? We were then in the business of the, this was, this was one of Dean's, when he was, ah, was it after that we sent him to Camp David?

EHRlichman: You sent him to Camp David on about the, ah, 20...

PRESIDENT: I would like to know with regard to that conversation, Bob, I just wanted to know.

EHRlichman: It took place about the 23rd, that is his trip to Camp David, about the 23rd of March.

HALDEMAN: When, when was that Hunt threat?

EHRlichman: I haven't any idea. I have no idea.

PRESIDENT: Get that worked out, please.

HALDEMAN: I don't know, better check on it.

PRESIDENT: Well, it, oh hell.

EHRlichman: Well, you'll know the date of your meeting here.

HALDEMAN: Well, uh, uh, you can't --

PRESIDENT: Well, (unintelligible) to say, I suppose then we should have cut it off, shut it off, because later on you met in your office and, I mean, and Mitchell said, "That was taken care of."

EHRlichman: The next day.

HALDEMAN: That's right.

UNIDENTIFIED: The same day.

HALDEMAN: Maybe I can find the date by that.

PRESIDENT: Yeah and Dean, Dean was there and said, "What about this money for Hunt?" Wasn't Dean there?

HALDEMAN: No, what happened was, Ehrlichman and Dean and Mitchell and I were in the office, my office, and we were discussing other matters. And in the process of it, Mitchell said, "Let me raise one point," and he turned to Dean. He said, "Let me raise another point, ah, have you taken care of the, the, is the other problem, Hunt's problem?" Something like that. I don't know how he referred to it. But we all knew instantly what he was, what he meant and Dean kind of looked a little flustered and said, "Well, well, ah, no, I mean I don't know where that is," or something; and Mitchell said, "Well I guess it's taken care of." And so we assumed from that, that Mitchell had taken care of it, and there was no further squeak out of it, so I now do assume Mitchell took care of it so...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, the problem I have there is I said, (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: Mitchell that LaRue, as I understand it, LaRue was Mitchell's agent, but ah...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, as I understand it, what I meant is, I'm just trying to seek out whether, I'm just seeing what are Dean's lines of attack are.

HALDEMAN: And you're saying, "Did I know about that?"
I did. Yeah, there's no question.

PRESIDENT: Say, "Yes, there was talk about it and so
forth, and Mitchell took care of it, but,
ah, gee, but, ah, on the other hand, you
make the case as to (unintelligible)..."

HALDEMAN: You can't testify to that, it's
Presidential--

PRESIDENT: In this office, but not in the other office,
not in your office.

HALDEMAN: o.k. but in the other office the question
of, of...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: ...and, and the specifics never arose. And
there again Dean is the agent on it. Dean's
coming in, saying, "What should I do?"
"Dean's the agent on all this. That's where
my money goes. All the input to me about
the 350 came from Dead and all the output
came from Dean. That's the only time I...

PRESIDENT: Then Dean was the one that said, "Look Bob,
we need 350 for or need the rest of the
money."

HALDEMAN: No, they didn't even come that way. Dean
said, "They need money for the defense."

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: For their fees.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: And that's the, was always put that way,
that's the way it was always discussed.

PRESIDENT: Right. That's why I want that line. I think that's the most important thing you can work on. Get a lawyer. (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: And I said.

PRESIDENT: lawyer.

HALDEMAN: And I said to Dean at that time, "Well look you've got a situation here. We've got the 300, I thought it was 350, it was 328, in cash that we needed to get turned back to the committee."

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: Apparently they had a need for money so we have a coincidence (unintelligible)-- now you ought to be able to work out some way to get them to take the cash, and that will take care of our needs, and apparently help meet their needs.

PRESIDENT: Right, right.

HALDEMAN: Then he went back to Mitchell, and Mitchell wouldn't do it, and then they agreed to take 40 thousand of it, which they did, and shortly thereafter they agreed to take the rest, which they did.

PRESIDENT: Do you think did you check with (unintelligible) before the election and shortly afterwards?

HALDEMAN: It was not before the election, no.

PRESIDENT: On that was what Dean's story was about and Dean said it was before.

HALDEMAN: Strachan.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: Strachan says it was in late November, the 30th, or 29th or some nonsense like that.

EHRlichman: Incidentally, remember you told me that, ah Strachan had gone over there with Colson's partner and that the Judge wouldn't take him.