

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A
MEETING BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND JOHN EHRLICHMAN ON APRIL 19,
1973, FROM 1:03 p.m., TO 1:30 p.m.

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PRESIDENT: Was it?

EHRLICHMAN: Yes, sir. And, you'll remember our response to that was, you cannot defend blackmail, in that kind of a situation.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRLICHMAN: And that's all that is, is pure blackmail.

PRESIDENT: Huh.

EHRLICHMAN: And we said, "No dice." and I could be just as flat out on that as that's the honest to God truth.

PRESIDENT: Now let me put, put one other question to you right. Very painful, I know it's very painful for you to think of this, and it is for me too, but anyway, but, uhh, I think it would be helpful if you had this consideration when you talk the rest of the day, this and that, bother you the rest of the day I hope. I think the separation problem has to be considered. I want you to look at it very coldly, not in terms of Bob, in terms of the President, the needs that we have and have had, and an atmosphere, Mr. So and So, look at this thing, in terms of your, about how you're involved in terms of whether it's going to be bad, and what, how you are involved, what Dean may say. Don't know what The son-of-a-bitch is going to say. I don't know what you do with the Dean (unintelligible) he's obviously very upset. He's just lashing out. Goddammit, I don't know what we've been told. I just don't know, John. Frankly, I'm at a loss. We were all talking frankly, that's why the counsel was sworn.

EHRlichman: Well, as I said...

PRESIDENT: That goddamn Dean.

EHRlichman: As I said this morning, I think you can very truthfully and logically and properly say that ...

PRESIDENT: I was trying to bury, I was trying, I was really trying to probe his thought processes. I went down every road we possibly could...

EHRlichman: Exactly right.

PRESIDENT: ...and see where we were.

EHRlichman: And it paid off. You see, you're the one who then came back and said, "I've got to have that all written down. Send that man to Camp David if necessary and have him take as much time as necessary and let's get it all down." That's when he was uncovered.

PRESIDENT: I suppose that really isn't true.

EHRlichman: Well...

PRESIDENT: Not that he was uncovered, it was simply the fact that he said, "By God, this thing is such a cancer and so forth, that I can't write it and there's no way we make a statement," and I said to you, John, "You better get into it." Take...

EHRlichman: Yes, but I happen to be...

PRESIDENT: Well...

EHRlichman: This may be some measure of hindsight, but I really don't think it is because my very conscious contemporary reaction when Dean came back and didn't have anything for us, was, whoops, there's something more here, because Dean could have constructed some kind of an artful ah, ah, evasion if he hadn't been so pervasively involved.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: For the, for the campaign committee or the White House, or whoever he wanted to protect, but, uhh, the thing that occurred to me when, when Bob told me what Dean said that he couldn't, he couldn't write it. I just had a mental image of the guy sitting there with big piles of paper saying, "I've just written a confession, and I would be nuts to deliver this to anybody."

PRESIDENT: Well, that's what we have to say.

EHRlichman: Well, I think, I think that's very very probable.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

EHRlichman: Yup.

PRESIDENT: Dean's got Shaffer and the rest. I don't know that he can't be, we may be able to exert privilege on Dean before the Grand Jury but we can't before the press. I (unintelligible).

EHRlichman: You can at the trial. And you certainly can in the press. Uh, uh...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

EHRlichman: I'd send, I'd send a fellow around to talk to Dean if this is a problem. Just say, "Look here, you are going to be liable, separately liable, for breach of confidentiality and, ah,..."

PRESIDENT: Is that a case?

EHRlichman: ...Well, I think you ought to get Petersen to advise you on this, but there certainly is, there certainly is a statutory protection, and I think you could invoke it.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) breach of confidentiality of a conversation with the President?

EHRlichman: Well, no, not as such, but on various national security bases, I, I'm just not that familiar with the statutes. I don't know what all you have in the way of statutory protection, but you remember that our CIA case...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...where the guy was enjoined by the court...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...we fell back on that body of law.

PRESIDENT: Incidentally, the other point he says that Dean obviously knows all of these and that's why he says Bittman is gravely concerned about the matter of the 120 because that gets him involved.

EHRlichman: Sure.

PRESIDENT: So, we may not, just Dean may talk about this but Bittman is not likely to. I would say, "What the hell is in it for Bittman to say that we asked for that." I just ask you, does that (unintelligible) the lawyer?

EHRlichman: Boy, put him in the soup. Puts him in. the soup, sure.

PRESIDENT: That he came and said, "I want 120 for..."

EHRlichman: You bet.

PRESIDENT: "...for, or otherwise you're going to blow the whistle or something."

EHRlichman: Yeah, yeah, you're right.

PRESIDENT: So here you've got a --

EHRlichman: So this is good information. Would be helpful, this fits right into our conversation in there. I will talk, I'll tell you what I think I would do...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...if you don't mind, I will take John Wilson aside and talk to him about this separation business.

PRESIDENT: Right, that's right.

EHRlichman: He's very wise and very...

PRESIDENT: I don't know how and we've got to get his judgment on it -- But Bob said this morning (unintelligible) We have to (unintelligible) ourselves (unintelligible). In a sense though, let's face it, John Mitchell lurks in the back here -- isn't that what it really gets down to? But God Almighty, we weren't protecting the White House now, right?

EHRlichman: That's correct.

PRESIDENT: We weren't protecting that, we're protecting John Mitchell.

EHRlichman: Yes sir.

PRESIDENT: All the way through.

EHRlichman: In the first instance we were protecting your your re-election in a sense. We didn't know what from.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

EHRlichman: Afterwards, though, this cover up business was pure Mitchell.

PRESIDENT: Sure, now. Bob says that, you know, you're, you're going to look bad if he goes.

EHRlichman: Well, there are two ways of looking at that, obviously --