

Conversation Number 739-4
June 21, 1972, 9:30-10:38 A.M.
Oval Office
President and Haldeman

[After a quick question about meeting with Federal Reserve Chairman Arthur Burns, and listening - with a few comments - to a five minute report from Haldeman about the Consumer Price Index, food prices, and a bill to limit the debt ceiling, the president raised Watergate.]

PRESIDENT: What's the dope on the, on the, ah, Watergate incident? Anything break on that, since we talked last night?

HALDEMAN: No. We talked about that, we don't talk about it at the staff meeting. It's very interesting because I've been prepared to cold-cock it if it comes up at the staff meeting.

PRESIDENT: It hasn't even come up?

HALDEMAN: You know, somebody made some crack about it or something, but it didn't come up. Nobody wanted to discuss it. The whole discussion was on the, ah—

PRESIDENT: Congressional?

HALDEMAN: Congressional questions, stuff we've got before us. But I talked with Mitchell afterwards.

PRESIDENT: Mitchell was at the staff meeting?

HALDEMAN: Yep.

PRESIDENT: Good, good. Sure glad to hear that. Good. Probably helps?

HALDEMAN: Yes. Doesn't say much. Well, but he does once in a while and he raises some good questions, more asking than telling. But it's very useful to have Mitchell there.

PRESIDENT: Yes.

HALDEMAN: There's nothing new. The whole question now is, Mitchell's concern is the FBI, the question of how far they're going in the process. And there's, he's pretty concerned that that be turned off, and then they're working on it, John [referring to Ehrlichman's working on it.]

PRESIDENT: My God, Ehrlichman, are you talking to Gray? It's got to be done by Ehrlichman.

HALDEMAN: Well, we were told yesterday in the discussion on this that we should not go direct to the FBI. Mitchell said today that we've got to, and he asked Ehrlichman to talk to Gray. John's doing it right now. The question that John and I raised, both of us have been trying to think with a one step away from it and look at a strategy on creating—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: See whether there's something that we can do other than just sitting here and watching it drop on us bit by bit as it goes along. And there is, ah, it's pretty tough to, ah, think of anything [unclear.] John laid out a scenario, Mitchell, which would involve, ah, this guy Liddy, at the committee confessing and taking, moving the thing up to that level, saying, 'Yeah, I did it, I did it. I hired these guys, sent them over there, because I thought it would be a good move and build me up in the operation; I'm a little guy--'

PRESIDENT: Liddy?

HALDEMAN: '—that nobody pays any attention to.'

PRESIDENT: Who's he? He the guy with the detective agency?

HALDEMAN: No. Liddy's the general counsel for the Re-Election Finance Committee—

PRESIDENT: Oh.

HALDEMAN: And he is the guy who did this.

PRESIDENT: Oh [a pained and quiet groan].

HALDEMAN: And, ah, he is [unclear].

PRESIDENT: Mitchell? Mitchell knew?

* According to the telephone logs of Acting FBI Director Patrick Gray, Ehrlichman called him at 9:35 A.M., as Haldeman was meeting with the President. According to Gray's later reconstruction of the call, Ehrlichman told him, "John Dean is going to be handling an inquiry into this thing for the White House. He's expecting your call." Gray further reports telling Ehrlichman, "as far as the FBI is concerned, we're treating this as a major special with all our normal procedures in effect. It's going to be an aggressive and thorough investigation and I expect we will be interviewing people at the White House. We'll need to set up procedural safeguards against leaks" (L. Patrick Gray III with Ed Gray, *In Nixon's Web: A Year in the Crosshairs of Watergate* [New York: Times Books, 2008] 63). Gray's reconstruction is strained, at best. There was no White House inquiry, and if Gray was bracing the White House for an aggressive "major special" investigation, Ehrlichman would likely have shared this fact with someone — which he did not — for he was very much subject to that investigation, and this was exactly the opposite reason for his making the call. At the time, Gray hoped very much to be nominated director, and such a statement to Ehrlichman would have assured not getting the nomination, as he later did. Ed Gray, who authored this book, relied on the reconstructed conversation given in his father's testimony. When Dean called Gray, as Gray testified, it was about the problems of the FBI leaks. See Gray's testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee, 9 SSC 3450.

HALDEMAN: Mitchell? I'm not really sure—

PRESIDENT: Mitchell's—

HALDEMAN: I'm not sure how much. Yeah. He obviously knew something. I'm not sure how much. He clearly didn't know any details.

PRESIDENT: Couldn't have. Isn't there some way you can get a little better protection, get a little better protection of the White House on that? I think that was rather complicit, too [unclear], you know what I mean, the Colson thing and so forth. I mean, he's taking a bad rap there. Of course, if he's taking the rap, basically the White House is taking the rap, the White House consultant business, and so forth and so on. Hell, yes, he [Hunt] worked for Kennedy, he worked for Johnson, now he working, he worked for the White House. That's the whole story about [him.]

HALDEMAN: That we did.

PRESIDENT: I see. Okay. Well, maybe there isn't much you can do about it [almost ten seconds of silence]. You're convinced, though, this is a situation where Colson is not involved, aren't you?

HALDEMAN: Yep. I'm completely convinced of that as anything. As far as I can determine, it is.

PRESIDENT: Is—

HALDEMAN: The problem is—

PRESIDENT: I'm not concerned about all, I am just concerned, ah, I just want to be sure we know what the facts are. Fine.

HALDEMAN: [Clears throat] So, I think, I think that is, that is the fact. The problem is that there are all kinds of other involvements and if they started a fishing thing on this they're going to start picking up threads. That's, that's what appeals to me about trying to get one jump ahead of them and—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear]

HALDEMAN: —Hopefully, cut the whole thing off and sink all of it. See, Ehrlichman paints a rather attractive picture on that, in that that gives you the opportunity to cut off the civil suit. The civil suit is potentially the most damaging thing to us, in terms of those depositions.

PRESIDENT: You mean you'd have Liddy confess and say he did it unauthorized?

HALDEMAN: Unauthorized. And then on the civil suit, we plead whatever it is, and you get a, what is it, a summary judgment or something. I forget what John, whatever the legal thing is. But, he saw that as the way to cut it off, too, and then let it go to trial on the question of damages, and that would eliminate the need for the depositions. In other words, you'd have, you know, the—

PRESIDENT: [Nine seconds of silence before responding] What do you think that they have to show as far as White House involvement is concerned? I am not too concerned [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Well, they're, we're getting a, a bad shot to a degree because, they're, they're, it's, you know, one-hundred percent by innuendo. There, there, the only tie they've got to the White House is that this guy's name was in their books, Howard Hunt, and that Hunt used to be a consultant—

PRESIDENT: To the White House?

HALDEMAN: —To Colson at the White House.

PRESIDENT: And he worked for the CIA. He worked in the Bay of Pigs. I mean, he's done a lot of things. So I've got to guess is that, I mean, it could be isolated instance, instances, I mean. The man's worked for various things, he's worked for—

HALDEMAN: You've got to be careful of pushing that very hard, because he's, he was working on a lot of stuff.

PRESIDENT: For Colson, you mean? Well, the declassification then?

HALDEMAN: No. It was that among other things. That's what we've said.

PRESIDENT: Well, did he work on that ITT thing, too?

HALDEMAN: Yes, see, and if they track that down—

PRESIDENT: He didn't, he didn't accomplish anything.

HALDEMAN: But he's the guy that went out and took, and talked to Dita Beard, in Denver.

PRESIDENT: That's, I see, I see, that [unclear], this Hunt is the Dita Beard contact?

HALDEMAN: Among other things. They've used him for a lot of stuff, apparently.

PRESIDENT: Hum, huh.

HALDEMAN: That's, it's like all these other things, it's all a fringe bits and pieces that you,

that you don't want to, that's why they have, and there's a very, why I've challenged this question of Hunt disappearing, and they say there is no question it's better for Hunt to disappear than for Hunt to, ah, be available. And there's no question that Hunt would be called in this.

PRESIDENT: Hum.

HALDEMAN: But the effectiveness of the Ehrlichman scenario or something like it is that you establish a reason, and you establish an admission of guilt, rather than just have a presumption, and you cut out the thing before, you establish the admission of guilt at a law level and get rid of it, rather than letting it imply guilt up to the highest levels, which is, of course, what they're trying very hard to do. By "they," [I mean] the press and the Democrats.

PRESIDENT: Well, sure, that's the same thing.

HALDEMAN: Although, it's incredible, Dan Rather comes on the, on the news and says: Well, it's been a tough week for the presidential candidates, and we have the Republicans tarred with the complicity in bugging the Democrats; we have McGovern in trouble with his radical views; and we have Hubert in trouble because he's lost his support. He kind of ransacked everybody up, which amazed me. I think our people deluded themselves, and I have to a degree, in thinking this was ah, a Washington story, that would, you know, not be of much interest to the networks, the networks aren't going to let it be that, because they didn't have much of any interest on it. Just, there's no new news. They're investigating those Cubans, they're invest, they're bound to un-run some of these strings.

PRESIDENT: Colson was telling me something about, ah, some charge that Rebozo was involved in.

HALDEMAN: I haven't seen that.

PRESIDENT: Jack Anderson made some charge.

HALDEMAN: Oh, really?

PRESIDENT: Some charge that, relationships sort of thing [unclear]. Why don't you call Colson and find out what column it was. Not column, Metromedia, where Jack Anderson said Rebozo was involved in it with the Cubans, one of the Cubans. I don't know.

HALDEMAN: Well, I'm, I'm sure they'll find a tie to Rebozo with the Cubans somewhere.

PRESIDENT: Oh, Christ, yes. But my point is that if he, if they made this kind of charges, if we could get the exact charge on this, and so forth, he ought to sue. You know what I mean, because he knows God damn well he's not involved with it. If they, see what I'm getting at is, what they would do is, they'd [unclear] him in order to tie him up—

HALDEMAN: Sure, sure.

PRESIDENT: Well, obviously, obviously if he has nothing whatever, had no knowledge at all, certainly [unclear] at all. Why don't you just call and ask him if he knows these people.

HALDEMAN: Okay.

PRESIDENT: But find out from Colson, get the, get the text of what Jack Anderson said on Metromedia.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Well, it's a hard one to handle, I realize.

HALDEMAN: Unfortunately, they're inter-meshing threats. One of these guys was, was over at the University of Miami trying to work out housing for the Youth for Nixon group at the convention.

PRESIDENT: I read that. They're all supporters of ours.

HALDEMAN: And two of them have been principals in the Nixon stuff down there. That's why, in a way—

PRESIDENT: You can't push a lot onto the Miami thing, can you? I mean, the Cuban thing.

HALDEMAN: Well, yeah, you can. You the lose that, it's a pretty flimsy—

PRESIDENT: You lose that with Liddy.

HALDEMAN: [Unclear] if you bring Liddy into it.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: That's one argument against it, because you can, you can work to claim that Howard Hunt, all the other guys have tie to the Cubans.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: Except, well, no, you could imply implicitly, tie in, I was going to say, except for this security guy, what's his name, McCord?

PRESIDENT: McCord.

HALDEMAN: And he was a CIA agent for 19 years or so.

PRESIDENT: Sure he was hired, for Christ's sake, for [employment.] He was hired because of his technical equipment, and the rest. The Cubans are [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Hunt was the tie to the Cubans.

PRESIDENT: He's the one that recruited the Cubans? [Brief silence.] An elaborate deal, wasn't it?

HALDEMAN: Mum, huh.

PRESIDENT: Apparently they said or they implied that they had some plans to bug McGovern headquarters, too?

HALDEMAN: Oh, I don't know. They found a plan of, that's a, that's a pretty shitty bit of journalism, incidentally, which they haven't pointed out and we shouldn't, but the committee can. They had a plan that showed the, the layout of the ballroom area at the Dora, the Doral Hotel, which is going to be McGovern's headquarters. What the press didn't point out is the Doral Hotel is also going to be the Nixon headquarters. And they might, we had a lot of plans of the Doral Hotel all over here, because it happens to be where we're going on our room arrangements. And that's true.

PRESIDENT: [I don't know who can take it on.] But who's over there at the committee that can do a little slam-banging on that sort of thing? I think that you ought to chip away at things of that sort that are so obvious.

HALDEMAN: Yeah. We should and we will. I've made a note of that one.

PRESIDENT: Dole?

HALDEMAN: That's, that's just a little—

PRESIDENT: Sure, I know, but I saw it in the paper. It's just a little thing to drop around.

HALDEMAN: And they've taken a very fast shot, but I think we've got to be careful not to jump on it, a fast shot at Colson, which is going to bother him today. And then—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: The Post runs a thing on the principals in the Democratic bugging incident—

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: And, you know, little biographies, a three-paragraph biography, on each of the principals. The first one is Howard Hunt, they talk about him. The second was Charles

Colson, and then come the five guys that were caught in the room, and then someone else, oh, the lawyer that they called in.

PRESIDENT: Humm. Liddy?

HALDEMAN: No, the lawyer they, they called. They hired counsel that they got to represent them.

PRESIDENT: Jesus Christ, it's a rough deal on Colson, isn't it?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, it is. But we've got to be careful not to, not to over-defend him. And Colson has to be careful not to overreact, and that's because, you know, sure he's clean on this little slice.

PRESIDENT: Yes, but he's involved in other things.

HALDEMAN: But it leads to other things that there's just it's better to take a little heat on this—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Than to open it up to all the others.

PRESIDENT: The one thing they have to do is to keep it in perspective from another standpoint. I was not of the opinion that it would just be a Washington story.

HALDEMAN: I kind of was. Well, not just a Washington story.

PRESIDENT: [Cross talking] I understand. I thought there were two, there's two different problems. Anything as bizarre as this—

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: —And interesting is going to be a national story. My view is, and I still hold with this view, that in terms of the reaction of people, the reaction is going to be primarily Washington and not the country, because I think the country is, doesn't give much of a shit about it. But in, when somebody else—

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: You see. Everybody around here is all mortified by it. It's a horrible thing to rebut. And the answer, of course is, that most people around the country I think that probably this is routine, that everybody's trying to bug everybody else, it's politics. That's my view. Now the purists probably won't agree with that, but, ah, I don't think they're going to see a great, a great uproar in the country about the Republican's committee trying to bug the Democratic headquarters.

HALDEMAN: Well that, that line of reasoning is, is ah—

PRESIDENT: At least that's my view.

HALDEMAN: — [Unclear] then it seems to me that argues for following the Liddy scenario saying, “Sure, some little lawyer who was trying to make a name for himself did a stupid thing.”

PRESIDENT: Is Liddy willing?

HALDEMAN: He says he is. Apparently he is a little bit nuts. And, ah, I have never met him, so it's not fair to draw any judgment. But apparently he's sort of a Tom Huston type guy.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. And [unclear] beat the bastards, right?

HALDEMAN: Well, and he sort of likes the dramatic. And kind of, you know, he's said, “If you want to put me before a firing squad and shoot me, that's fine.” Kind of like to be like Nathan Hale, he told—

PRESIDENT: The lawyer? Oh, I thought it was the guy that, I thought that was the fellow that, the, ah, that was the fellow that runs the agency.

HALDEMAN: No. We don't know what, what his position is. There are, they all seem to think he will hang tight. But you see, the beauty of the Liddy scenario is that as far as anybody under him is concerned, he's where it came from.

PRESIDENT: He ordered it.

HALDEMAN: So even if those, even if we can't count on those guys, if we admit, if Liddy admits guilt, then those guys can think any way they want and it won't matter.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Because it'll all tie back to Liddy and he says, “Yeah, I got the money and I paid them the money and I told them to bug the place and I was going to be a hero. And everybody's.” And then, then we ask for compassion. This is a poor misguided kid who read too many spy stories, a little bit nutty, and obviously we'll have to get rid of him, we made a mistake in having him in there and that's too bad.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear] looks like, look, breaking and entering, breaking and entering and so forth, without accomplishing it, is not a hell of a lot of crime. The point is that this is not, the only thing I'd say if somebody was going to ask me about, do you agree with Ziegler's cut calling it a third-rate burglary, I'd say, no, I disagree; it was a third-rate attempted burglary.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: That's what it was.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: And it failed. I told [unclear] I'd checked the law [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Well, they don't seem, they don't think they can hurt much on that. If they take a guilty plea, they, the lawyers all feel that they, they would get a fine and a suspended sentence.

PRESIDENT: Suspended sentence.

HALDEMAN: As long as they're all first offenders, which they apparently all are.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So who's going to talk to Mitchell today about this?

HALDEMAN: We have.

PRESIDENT: He's thinking about the Liddy thing. My inclination is that's what you have to do. My inclination is you have to do it due to the fact that, if that's the truth, the truth you always figure may come out, and you're a hell of a lot better doing that than to build another tissue around the God damn thing.

HALDEMAN: Better—

PRESIDENT: Let me say this. If it involved Mitchell, then I would think that you couldn't do it, just because it would destroy him, you know, its, as a—

HALDEMAN: Well, that's what bothers Ehrlichman. He's not sure it doesn't.

PRESIDENT: Does it involve Mitchell?

HALDEMAN: Yeah. And I put, put it almost directly to Mitchell this morning and he didn't answer, so I don't know whether it does or not.

PRESIDENT: Probably did. But don't tell me about it, but you go ahead and do what you want. But if Liddy'll take the rap on this, that's [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Well, we can take care of him, that's, ah—

PRESIDENT: Yeah [unclear.] I wouldn't try to shove it in Miami, but I think that you're going to have Hunt on the lam, wherever he is, that's going to be quite a story, to be searching for, where is Hunt, he's disappeared, and so forth.

HALDEMAN: Yeah, except that—

PRESIDENT: On the other hand—

HALDEMAN: Except they've got no direct tie from Hunt, at least up until now.

PRESIDENT: The fact that he's missing bears out the fact that he's [accused] with the Cubans, for the man on the street.

HALDEMAN: The problem there is, is that's why it's important to get to the FBI. There's, as of now, there's nothing that puts Hunt into, into the case except his name in their notebooks along with a lot of other things.

PRESIDENT: Why did the FBI put out all of that stuff, it seems to me a rather bad thing to do. I mean, when you're investigating a case, you don't put out the fact that you found this bit of evidence, you found names and notebooks and the rest.

HALDEMAN: The Bureau didn't. The police did.

PRESIDENT: Oh, I see. Okay, that would add up. They're sort of stupid. Some press man gets to them, you know.

HALDEMAN: On this one, you got to figure this, cause of the pressure here, damn near everything's going to get out, I'm sure that, that they've bought policemen, and they'll undoubtedly have bought FBI agents, so they'll [unclear.] Califano's got two men right in the U.S. Attorney's office.

PRESIDENT: Well, we'd do the same thing, wouldn't we?

HALDEMAN: Sure. Oh, hell, they, they're doing exactly, and the lawsuit evidently is—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear]

HALDEMAN: Is a damn good move. They've got Edward Bennett Williams into depositions—

PRESIDENT: How soon do they get those?

HALDEMAN: Well, they, John, again, the lawyers think we can, we can, ah, go for some varying things and hold that up for a bit. That, that the Democrats, or course, are, Bennett Williams is, is going to press to start immediately. [Four seconds of silence.] And they've made no bones about it. They've said the reason they're doing it is to get the depositions. [Silence for over a minute with sound of paper shuffling.]

PRESIDENT: Will, what you need is, ah, what you can do about it today is, is for

Ehrlichman to talk to Gray. Got to find out what the law is, depositions, and so forth. [Softly spoken, then strongly] They're going to have Colson, for example, on depositions. And he'd have to, they'd probably try to unravel his whole relationship with Hunt.

HALDEMAN: Which he could say is irrelevant, or his counsel could say is irrelevant, but that doesn't matter in a deposition. That's the problem. At least that's what Ehrlichman and Mitchell were explaining to me. The problem with a deposition process is that you don't have the protection of your—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear]

HALDEMAN: —The court. You can refuse to answer, but then the take of the deposition, I understand, can go to the court and get an order for you to answer. [Silence for ten seconds.]

PRESIDENT: Well—

HALDEMAN: See on [unclear]—

PRESIDENT: You don't have much of a choice there, looks like, if the Liddy guy will do this [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Mitchell's, rightly I think, a little afraid, cause of Liddy's instability. And the question of what exactly, he says he'll do it, but what exactly will he do when, ah, when the [the temperature's on.] Because, obviously, they'll see that as a way for us to get out of it, and they're not going to let him off any easier than they have to.

PRESIDENT: Mumm. [Groaned.]

HALDEMAN: [Responding to the president's groan.] For sure, that. John just enveloped, developed this scenario as we were talking this morning—

PRESIDENT: Ehrlichman?

HALDEMAN: Ehrlichman. And he, and Mitchell, and I, all thought we ought to, ought not to, you know, that, that it, on first blush looked liked it had some possibilities, we ought to work on what's wrong with it. [Silence for ten seconds, then the president starts moving away from the subject of Watergate when he speaks.]

PRESIDENT: Well, I think my intuition about not doing a press thing today is a good one, don't you?

HALDEMAN: Probably. I, I don't know—

PRESIDENT: The McGovern story is going to be big tonight. [He also tells Haldeman that he should learn more about the Watergate incident, "what the tactics are" before "he

“gets out there and starts commenting on it.” Haldeman says, “You ought to not comment on it anyway.” The president agrees, “Well, I know, but just no commenting is hard to do too.” And they begin reviewing the president’s schedule. This has been approximately a 25 minute discussion of Watergate, and it is not over.]

PRESIDENT: Maybe I should give Colson a ring.

[Haldeman reports on Common Cause filing a suit against the *New York Times* over failing to identify the sponsors of an advertisement to impeach the president over the war.]

PRESIDENT: Was Colson in the staff meeting this morning?

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

[The president requests another unidentified aide to see if Colson is available to come to the office for a meeting. And tells Haldeman that Colson is “extremely sensitive” to the charges being made against him. And they return to the president’s schedule, a meeting on domestic economic matters. The president makes a number of phone calls, as Colson arrives at 10:13 A.M., and the conversation quickly turns to Watergate.]

PRESIDENT: Bob was talking to me about [Watergate and] the God damn *Post* thing [unclear], well you check it. I told Bob on the *Post* thing, he said he didn’t hear about it. Just shows you this, we have with all of our hundreds of people around here reading things like this, can you get it?

COLSON: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: Because Rebozo—

HALDEMAN: Has taken all hell.

PRESIDENT: He’s been so abused.

COLSON: That was the most libelous thing, to take a person [referring to himself] who’s a member of the bar and who’s practiced law for ten years and put him in a lineup with a bunch of criminals.

HALDEMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: Well, you can’t libel political men.

COLSON: That’s right.

PRESIDENT: So you forget it. But you can libel Rebozo. He’s a banker.

COLSON: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Goddamn it, he can sue.

COLSON: Our new media man, Jim [Shirts], he looked at that article, and said that's the God damnest thing I've ever seen in my life. Incredible.

PRESIDENT: Sure.

COLSON: The one were seven principals involved in the break-in—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.] What is the best strategy, you think?

COLSON: Oh, lay low, lay low.

PRESIDENT: Give 'em a crack?

COLSON: On this one? No, let's, let's, let's hope this thing will go away. And I think--

PRESIDENT: You think it will go away?

HALDEMAN: That's ridiculous. Why in the world would the—

PRESIDENT: How could they let it go away?

HALDEMAN: If you were anybody at any level in the Democratic Party, would you let this go away?

PRESIDENT: Chuck, Hunt, Hunt's [connection], they're going to make a big case out of that, aren't they?

COLSON: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: (Unclear.)

COLSON: So when, what do they say?

PRESIDENT: What do they say? Well, they're getting ready to put Mitchell in a deposition.

COLSON: You'll have, well, but that can be stalled until after the election. In a civil suit? A civil suit, I don't think I think can be dismissed. I don't believe there's a basis for an invasion of privacy. They're a public—

PRESIDENT: It's a possibility. I mean, I just hope we get a good lawyer [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: No, no, that's Colson's lawyer. [Laughter.]

PRESIDENT: Well, is he a good man?

HALDEMAN: [Unclear.] They don't have a lawyer yet. That's, ah, that's high on the agenda this morning.

PRESIDENT: I wish to Christ that Choitner were clean. He is clean, can't use him.

COLSON: No.

PRESIDENT: What you need is a gut fighter.

COLSON: You want a, a—

PRESIDENT: Somebody to take Edward Bennett Williams, snarl at him, [unclear].

HALDEMAN: Told Ehrlichman you've got to get the best guy and [unclear] with him.

COLSON: When I say let it go away, I'm not Pollyannaish. I don't think it will necessarily blow away by itself, but I don't think we should do anything that escalates it unless—

PRESIDENT: Unless there's a confession?

COLSON: —Unless there's a clean way out of it, which I—

PRESIDENT: Well, how about the Liddy thing? Is that a clean way out of it now?

COLSON: [Silence for a few seconds for Colson does not seem to know what the president is talking about, so he proceeds without comment.] What I'm amazed at, and this is what Shirts, one of the points that Shirts made, is that no one, not a single reporter, has asked where Howard Hunt has been for the last three months, because they don't want to ask, because they would much rather say that he's still a consultant to the White House.

HALDEMAN: No, they have all reported that he's not.

COLSON: Yeah, but—

HALDEMAN: They all reported that he terminated on March 29.

PRESIDENT: No, the *Washington Post*—

COLSON: And every story says that he was a consultant.

PRESIDENT: No, no, no, no. In fairness, the *Washington Post* on its front page today in its story does not say "former consultant." He says "consultant."

HALDEMAN: That's right.

COLSON: NBC News last night—

PRESIDENT: Consultant to the White House—

COLSON: The network said—

HALDEMAN: Always buried in the story somewhere is the fact that he's no longer at the White House.

COLSON: I know. Why didn't they ask where he is and what he's doing? Because they want to keep the impression that he's still here. The NBC Network News did it beautifully last night, skillfully.

PRESIDENT: Said he was still working as a [unclear?]

COLSON: Said he is a consultant to the White House. They put it in the first [part].

PRESIDENT: Well, somebody call 'em?

COLSON: Yes, sir, they've been called.

PRESIDENT: Did it do any good?

COLSON: I suppose they won't say that again.

[President takes a telephone call. The material is withdrawn. When it ends, the discussion of Watergate resumes.]

PRESIDENT: You can talk all you want. You can get all disturbed about this, sure. But it has to be about this bugging incident and so forth and so on. I mean, taking it at its worst, all right, suppose we didn't [unclear.] The only part of it that should be knocked down strongly is the White House involvement, because there is no White House involvement. That's the point, that we didn't know a goddamn thing about it. But, ah, I guess Ziegler has done that as much as you think he can.

HALDEMAN: What they're trying to do—

COLSON: Ron did very well, [both times] yesterday.

HALDEMAN: What they're trying to do with Ron, they're trying very hard to trap him into giving, ah, the president is very upset about this—

PRESIDENT: Concerned—

HALDEMAN: And is stepping in to order an investigation, by the president, you know, and so on. And they're trying to trap him into it by saying, well, what you're saying is the president doesn't care about this. Or, you mean the president isn't interested? It doesn't make any difference to him? He doesn't think this is important. Put words into it. But Ron's fully aware of what they're trying to do and—

PRESIDENT: He's very good at it, out of habit. Just imagine what you'd have if you had everybody out there asking, just imagine what he'd be.

COLSON: Ron is, Ron is, he's, ah, ah, never cease to amaze at how adept he is at handling those guys. That's a very tough job.

PRESIDENT: He's tough. He knows the curves and he knows what they're trying to get out and he knows what they're going to print and all the rest. He does a beautiful job. [Silence for five seconds.] [Well, we'll see.] I still think, as I told Bob, that we won't get agreement from most of our White House people on this because they're so conscious about subjects, let's see, have we had one on credibility lately? Remember, that was John Ehrlichman.

COLSON: Oh, yeah.

HALDEMAN: This, this relates to credibility

PRESIDENT: This is a credibility issue?

COLSON: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Credibility [unclear], our lack, I see. But what I had is, I was thinking of credibility on Vietnam and that sort of thing.

HALDEMAN: No. Credibility on Vietnam has gone away now, because—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.] Credibility is civil rights, ah, repression, lack of availability to the, you know, questioning, and so forth and so on and so on. What I'm saying is this, that this kind of story is going to play nationally because it's so bizarre. What I'm saying is that it's distinguished from things like ITT; it is not one that is going to get people that goddamn excited about, who the hell's interested, because they don't give a shit about repression and bugging and all the rest. Huh?

COLSON: I think they expect it. As I've said to you they think that political parties do this all the time.

PRESIDENT: They do. They certainly do.

COLSON: They think that companies do this. You know, there have been marvelous stories written about industrial espionage.

PRESIDENT: Sure, sure, sure. Well, they do.

COLSON: How Ford sends agents into General Motors to get the designs. People just sort of expect this. They don't, if they were in there stealing money—

PRESIDENT: Governments do it. We all know that.

HALDEMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Nevertheless, companies do it. Political parties do it. The point is that we, ah, as I said, the main concern is to keep the White House out of it, and I think Ron's doing very well. That's probably a pretty good reason for me to do my own press thing tomorrow rather than today. Because I—

[The president's voice is cut off by a tone for withdrawal of personal material. When the tone ends, the conversation about Watergate continues.]

PRESIDENT: But your feeling is do nothing before we get a debate [unclear.] Bob feels on this is we ought to put Liddy up there, on, take the rap on it, I'm sorry, and this and that, that's that. Your feelings?

COLSON: Well, I hadn't thought about that aspect of it, as far as—

PRESIDENT: It's the PR aspect [unclear.] Remember, remember, there was a time when you felt, [when you compared it to] ITT, it was to cut our losses and get out. Now, that's really what John Ehrlichman and Bob have been talking about, to cut our losses and get out of this damn thing.

COLSON: Well, I'd like to cut our losses and get out.

PRESIDENT: But can you think of a way?

COLSON: Well, I don't know. I don't know enough. I deliberately have not gotten that much into it because I could take an affidavit today that I, that I know nothing about it.

PRESIDENT: Good, stay out of it.

COLSON: Good position to be in.

PRESIDENT: Good idea, good idea. But given your argument you don't agree? What do you mean? Give us the feeling that you have about letting it ride through [unclear?] What do you mean, letting it go away? How can it?

COLSON: Well, I don't think it'll go away, Mr. President. I think when the grand jury convenes that there'll be stories about it. I think when they, when they look for Hunt

there'll be stories about it. I think the Democrats at the national convention will make a lot of rhetoric about it, make a lot of noise about it. My basic feeling is that it is not an issue that rubs off on you as long as the White House is out of it, because it's, to most people they don't know the Committee for the Re-Election of the President or whether it's the National Committees, it's the political apparatus.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: And I think people tend to expect this kind of thing to happen.

HALDEMAN: They're trying to do a good job on this, incidentally over there, which is in this case when they talk about it they talk about it as the campaign committee, instead of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. They're trying to keep the president out of it and just talk about his campaign committee, so people will think of it as—

COLSON: The TV is worked right against them—

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

COLSON: —But they, they have fought hard to do that, and it's a good thing.

HALDEMAN: They don't fully succeed, obviously.

COLSON: —No, I'm not so sure—

PRESIDENT: That's good, though, Bob. That's good.

COLSON: Also, using Dole as the principal spokesman is marvelous, because that looks like the Republicans National Committee, even though he—

HALDEMAN: I think we should use Dole to counter O'Brien.

PRESIDENT: I think Dole, if I could only suggest one thing, [unclear] be better at defending the national committee against O'Brien, should attack O'Brien for this malicious libel by innuendo, of guilt by association on the president. In other words, don't say Colson because basically, that, that is what happens, you see, because the only reason they're kicking Colson is because they say White House presidential assistant Colson, see. Has that occurred to anybody?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, that, that has at least, it has a strong negative, but so far it isn't getting to the White House. If Dole starts defending the White House—

PRESIDENT: You don't think so?

HALDEMAN: —You're putting the White House in—

PRESIDENT: You see the news summary this morning?

HALDEMAN: Yes, I don't think it has.

PRESIDENT: You don't?

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: Okay, if you say so. You know, from my obser—

HALDEMAN: I think, frankly, they're trying to.

COLSON: Well, if—

PRESIDENT: If you're right, I, I just saw so many references to the White House in the News Summary, in particular the TV.

COLSON: Yeah, but I watched all three TVs, and Bob is right, ah, the—

PRESIDENT: Okay. Good. All the, as of now—

HALDEMAN: Yet they're trying. If they do—

COLSON: Well—

HALDEMAN: Then, if they get somewhere with that, I think some of these other things are going to start overtaking that—

PRESIDENT: Like what? What other things?

HALDEMAN: They'll start running out on the, on the court suit. And, I mean, on the grand jury. And the legal—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear remark about "Hunt" disappearing and the "civil suit." Then, softly chuckling and referring to Hunt:] He must be a pretty good guy, though.

COLSON: He's got one of the most interesting careers of anybody I've known. The tragedy is that the guy is a, is a dedicated patriot.

PRESIDENT: [Disheartening.] Let me ask you this [cross talking.] He, ah, and he deliberately just decided he's not going to be around, is that right? That's what I hear.

COLSON: [Chuckling.] I don't know. [*Note: This statement puts the lie to Colson's testimony in regards to Hunt getting out of town.*]

HALDEMAN: He isn't around.

COLSON: You know, he's, he's—

PRESIDENT: Well, you know, you don't want him in here, Bob.

COLSON: He came in to me in February and he said to me, this is the only year I care about. The most important thing that ever happens is this man be re-elected. I just want to help. And you just, you hate to see the poor guy get it.

PRESIDENT: Oh, well. [Unclear.]

COLSON: It just happens. Oh, he's lived through this before.

PRESIDENT: What the hell, the Bay of Pigs, for Christ sake.

COLSON: He lived in exile once before, [chuckling] and so forth.

HALDEMAN: He's used to this sort of stuff.

COLSON: Oh, this is—

PRESIDENT: It's part of his life.

COLSON: It is.

PRESIDENT: Risking [unclear], imaginative.

COLSON: Total.

PRESIDENT: He's written 42 novels.

COLSON: He's made a lot of money—

HALDEMAN: I must say [cross talking] as inept as it certainly appears to be [unclear.]

COLSON: I can't believe he, he engineered it because he's—

PRESIDENT: So anyway, don't let the bastards get you down, Chuck.

[Colson left the Oval Office around 10:22 A.M., and the president and Haldeman briefly discussed the president's schedule, with Haldeman departing at 10:38 A.M. As with Haldeman in the first part of this conversation, the president had Colson in a Watergate conversation for approximately 25 minutes.]