

Conversation Number 741-10  
June 23, 1972, 1:04-1:13 P.M.  
Oval Office  
President and Haldeman

[Mostly inaudible without special equipment.]

Author's Notes and Partial Transcript:

The audio quality of this recording is very poor and inaudible in some sections because of noise on the president's desk, and the president's position vis-à-vis the microphones, but playing the audio at varying speeds, sound levels and filters much of it is discernable - far more than the WSPF was able to transcribe.

Prosecutors, historians, and the president himself read this conversation as the president further thrusting himself into the meeting with Helms and Walters by summoning Haldeman to the Oval Office just before the meeting. In fact, Haldeman was there for a totally unrelated reason that resulted in his being late to the meeting with Helms and Walters. Haldeman fudges why he is with the president before the meeting in his Watergate memoir, in which it is difficult to distinguish DiMona's imagination from Haldeman's information.

Haldeman's calendar placed him in the Oval Office from 12:15 P.M., but the president's daily diary recorded that Haldeman met with the president from 1:04 P.M. to 1:13 P.M. There is more going on here than meets the eye, and by placing the events into context, it is clear what happened. The president's researchers, who assisted him in reconstructing events for his memoir, got it wrong. The president did not, as he wrote in his memoir, "buzz...for Haldeman to come in again" following his meeting with economic advisers and the two ceremonial meetings, to further instruct him further on what to say to Helms and Walters.<sup>1</sup> This is relevant because it was Haldeman who was the moving force for the meeting with Helms and Walters, not the president.

What clearly occurred was that the meeting with Helms and Walters had disrupted Ehrlichman's tight schedule on June 23, so Haldeman returned to the Oval Office following the last ceremonial meeting - a nine minute grip-and-grin session for the camera - with the White House staff of Fred Malek's staff at 1:04 P.M. But Haldeman did not just pop in; rather he had to have spoken with the president earlier, most likely in one of the smaller offices adjoining the Oval Office - which would not have been recorded. Based on Haldeman's appointment calendar, it appear this occurred at 12:15 P.M., after the president's meetings with a dozen people with whom he discussed economic policy who departed at 12:15 P.M. and before the president when into his next meeting with two other advisers, plus Treasury Secretary George Shultz, who attended both meetings. [Haldeman would often have either Steve Bull or Alex Butterfield alert him as to when he could catch the president between meetings for a brief moment, which had to have happened here, because when the president met with Haldeman at 1:04 P.M., he already knew the reason Haldeman was back in his office.]

Haldeman had tried to call the president at 10:41 A.M. to explain the situation after their earlier meeting and tell him that Ehrlichman had arranged for Helms and Walters to come to Ehrlichman's office at 1 P.M., but given Ehrlichman's schedule, it called for logistical changes. Rather than Ehrlichman going over the signing statement for the Higher Education Bill, which was to be released that afternoon, as well as an on-camera statement by the president, which he was to film that afternoon in Family Theater for the network nightly news shows, Haldeman would handle these matters for Ehrlichman. The president understood that releasing a statement that afternoon, and preparing his remarks for the teleprompter which was done on a large font typewriter, required several hours lead time. Because Ehrlichman had attended the meeting the president held with his economic advisers in the Oval Office from 10:30 A.M. until 12:15 P.M., and then was scheduled to appear in the White House press room to do a background briefing on the Higher Education Bill with Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Elliot Richardson, he would be busy right up to the time of the meeting with Helms and Walters. Thus, Haldeman would take care of the statements for the Higher Education Bill, rather than Ehrlichman, who could not meet with Helms and Walters and get the president's approval of these statements.

When Haldeman entered the Oval Office at 1:04 P.M. this had all been explained to the president - off microphone - and his only questions were whether he would read the draft statement on bussing from a draft or read it off the teleprompter, when he filmed the statement for the evening news that afternoon in the Family Theater. Haldeman told him it would be done on the teleprompter, and gave him the draft statement. With pen in hand, the president can be clearly heard editing the statements. [The sound of his pen scratching sentence and adding new material was easily picked up by the microphones planted in his desk. In addition, the recording equipment also picked up the sound of an electric typewriter, which was usual. This meant that one of the doors to the Oval Office remained open, so it is very likely given the time pressures, that Haldeman was taking the president's edited copy to one of the president's secretaries as he finished his editing. It could have been either of two doors entering the Oval Office which lead to secretarial offices, and it is not clear (nor important) which secretary did the typing.]

See: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3473&st=higher+education&st1>

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3474&st=busing&st1>

As the time passed, and knowing he and Ehrlichman had scheduled a 1:00 P.M. meeting with Helms and Walters, Haldeman can be heard picking up the telephone - as the president was busy editing - and telling the White House Operator he wanted to speak to Ehrlichman. When Ehrlichman came on the line, Haldeman asked, "Where are they?" Ehrlichman unmistakably reported that Helms and Walters had arrived. Haldeman then responded, "Okay, I'll be up in a minute." This call, the pending meeting, and Haldeman's call to Ehrlichman prompted the president to again address his thoughts on how Haldeman and Ehrlichman should handle their visit with Helms and Walters.

PRESIDENT: Okay. Take the God damn thing. And, just, just postpone the [unclear]. What are you [unclear]?

HALDEMAN: Just [unclear.]

PRESIDENT: All that [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: [Unclear.]

PRESIDENT: [Unclear, but the president can be heard tapping his finger on his desk, a contemplative gesture, before and as he shared his thoughts.] I'd say the primary reason you've got to cut it the hell off. I just don't think, ah, it would be very bad to have this fellow Hunt, ah, you know, he, he knows to damn much. And he was involved, we happen to know that. And if it gets out, the whole, this is all involved in the Cuban thing, it's a, it's a fiasco, and it going to make the FBI, the CIA look bad, it's going to make Hunt look bad, and it's likely to blow the whole, ah, Bay of Pigs thing, which we think would be very unfortunate for the CIA, and for the country at this time, and for American foreign policy. And he's just got to [tell him], lay off. That what you—?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, that's, that is the basis I'm going to do it on. Just leave it at that.

PRESIDENT: I don't want them to get any idea that we're doing it because of our concern about the political, and, ah, they know, I wouldn't tell them it is not political—

HALDEMAN: Right.

PRESIDENT: I'd just say, look, it's because of the Hunt involvement, just say, yeah, Hunt got involved, is involved, ah, in this sort of thing, the whole cover is, ah, basically this. [Going to be (unclear).] That cover, it's a good move. [With that comment, the president changed the topic of the conversation, and his tone, when referring to his earlier meetings with his economic advisers, which had addressed, among other things, the problem of rising beef prices and quotas on some foreign beef.]

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<sup>1</sup> RN at 642.