

Conversation Number 742-8
June 26, 1972, 9:50-10:45 A.M.
Oval Office
President and Haldeman

[The conversation transcribed below originally began at 1:26:55.0 on tape 742a.]

HALDEMAN: [Unclear in regards to Martha Mitchell.] It all began when they were out there.

PRESIDENT: Is it the same story?

HALDEMAN: It's not the same story, well, it's part of that story. [Cross talking.] Well, she was raising hell with the telephone people out there. [Unclear] she came back. John's had some friends with her. He's had some people staying on top of her. And as soon as she started this phone call—

PRESIDENT: He talked to you?

HALDEMAN: Yeah. And as soon as she started this phone call to Helen Thomas's from out there, they send a security guy in, pulled her phones out.

PRESIDENT: Ahh [which sounds more like a disapproving “ugh.”]

HALDEMAN: That's what she—

PRESIDENT: That's what—

HALDEMAN: That's when she sang out I'm a prisoner.

PRESIDENT: They [beat her] black and blue?

HALDEMAN: I can't imagine that. [Maybe] they had to forcibly pull her away from the phone, or something. But, ah, she then called Helen Thomas last night.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, again. Helen Thomas [cross talking]—

HALDEMAN: [Unclear.]

PRESIDENT: Helen Thomas ought not to be brought into this thing, God damn it, as a matter of decency. The woman's sick, and [unclear].

HALDEMAN: Well, John, he just talked to me on the way out, he's, he's going to go up and get her. I don't know what he's going to do with her, but he said he was going to get her. But he said, he's got to get it, it taken care of.

PRESIDENT: Well, it's never ending. [Spoken very softly, with frustration in his voice.]

HALDEMAN: It always, it just keep hitting him. The damn ITT business with Kleindienst, and then now the bugs, the bugging. [Unclear.] It hit him a lot harder, again. I think, well, I can't tell him, he's just got to decide it himself, and he will.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

HALDEMAN: He can't cope with this. He's got to make a decision, and he's made it, and it took him a long time in '68, and he finally made it. And once he did, it, ah, it's still a burden on he because he, ah—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear, cross talking.]

HALDEMAN: —He figures, hell, he's better off knowing she's safe [unclear.]

PRESIDENT: Maybe he should send her abroad. [Silence.] You know, Mexico. [Said softly, sadly.]

HALDEMAN: Locking her up is a problem, but I think he can make the point that, and get a little sympathy for it, that she's had a nervous breakdown, or something, that she's ill, not well—

PRESIDENT: [Where's he going to put her?]

HALDEMAN: Rest home.

PRESIDENT: Any sophisticated person reading that story will realize she's sick.

HALDEMAN: Damn right.

PRESIDENT: I mean, shit, Helen Thomas [unclear.] I should call Helen Thomas myself. If I told her, she'd keep it quiet.

HALDEMAN: I'm not sure she would. You called her that night about [unclear] she printed that the next day, as soon as she could get to a phone.

PRESIDENT: I know that, but this is quite different.

HALDEMAN: You think so, because this is—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: —This is personal tragedy, kind of thing, that, that she's gotten her exploitation out of it now.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Well, it prepares her for writing a kind of story about John. She's had the story is the problem—

HALDEMAN: I'd—

PRESIDENT: You don't think [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Knowing John's sensitivities and the way he handles these things, I'm—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

HALDEMAN: —Reluctant to get into it, or have you get into it, and, ah, just, John, it's horrible, can't be held for any, any, and he was very, it's a thing where John's very, he doesn't want anybody fooling around. He doesn't make any bones about the problem with some of us, but—

PRESIDENT: Yeah. [Sighs.] Is it booze or nervous breakdown or both?

HALDEMAN: Both, I think.

PRESIDENT: They're hard, they're very very hard to [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: We've always excused it on the basis of drinking but I'm not sure that's it.

PRESIDENT: I'm [unclear], although drinking has with some people—

HALDEMAN: Well, it's a combination. I think she drinks because of her problem, and she has a problem because she drinks.

PRESIDENT: One just aggravates the other.

HALDEMAN: The two accelerate each other.

PRESIDENT: And she gets on the God damn phone. The one thing though, I think John can control [her access, control her use of] the phone, [as far as that goes].

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: I mean, I mean, you can certainly cover long distance calls that she makes.

HALDEMAN: Just don't let her use, that, that's what, you've got to put her, see she travels around, she calls in every hotel room—

PRESIDENT: [Nixon's sighs with frustration, and can be heard knocking a hand or fist on his desk.]

HALDEMAN: —And she'll find a way. See she's smarter than she was in '68. She's been here for four years, and she knows how to use the press.

PRESIDENT: I noticed an interesting thing here. The left wingers are having a hell of a time laying gloves on us on things. The bugging, ITT, and Carswell, Lavelle, [all those together, aren't hurting the president's] [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: It's, you know, a monumental attempt to Joe Kraft's the case.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Column yesterday to—

PRESIDENT: I'm sure this was to defeat us.

HALDEMAN: Well, no, not that it was going to defeat us, that they're trying to build the thing, it always, you know, this whole, I don't know what you call it, the credibility issue, or whatever. Now it isn't repression, it's, it's trying to impact, ah, that, that there's no moral concern about things that, you know, using shady dealings, and that sort of thing, to try an build, in other words, Carswell was involved in shady dealings, Lavelle was a shady deal, ah, the ITT was a shady deal, [cross talk] this is a shady deal.

PRESIDENT: [Throw 'em out], what the hell.

HALDEMAN: Well, you know, there, there in we haven't hit Lavelle hard enough, regarding the court martial. They way Truman hit MacArthur or something, you know, and—

PRESIDENT: For Christ sake, Lavelle [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Different case, anyway.

PRESIDENT: Well, for Christ's sake, [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: MacArthur defied direct presidential orders.

PRESIDENT: Yep. That's right.

HALDEMAN: Lavelle hedged on a, on a purposely [unclear] order. And was not, he was not the supreme commander.

PRESIDENT: [Sighs.]

HALDEMAN: And Carswell, hell, that, that—

PRESIDENT: Oh, shit.

HALDEMAN: —That was a totally different case. But they say look at this one, that captured some public [attention] at the time, so they got a little something there. It's all part of the erosion thing, that their, that their obviously going to work on, that, that, Kraft can make the case that, that the interesting thing in the bugging case was that nobody, that everybody has, has taken the view that it's ludicrous, that, that the Republicans couldn't be so stupid as to do something like this.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: But that nobody has taken the view that either John Mitchell or Richard Nixon was morally above such a thing, therefore it was obviously impossible.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, yeah.

HALDEMAN: See that's, it's, it's, they're trying to weave around in that, ah, bother in that kind of thing.

[Conversations shifts to Kissinger's conversation with Steward Alsop, the liberal press's opposition to the president, having Colson address a *Post* story that compared McGovern's foreign policy to Eisenhower's, speech writing, Julie's press coverage, drafting a statement on beef prices and the president's annoyance with the media reaction to his response to the arrests at the DNC's Watergate offices.]

PRESIDENT: Well, for Christ's sake, I said I completely share, ah, the, that so and so said, that this kind of activity has no place in our political, what in the name of Christ do they want? I could, I think Ziegler ought to crack somebody on that one, I mean, what the hell, what do they want me to do, jump up and down and say this is a horrifying thing? No, I'll tell you, there's a plus side of all this. I'm sure you can see what it is. I think they're reaching. Do you agree, or not?

HALDEMAN: Absolutely.

PRESIDENT: Okay.

HALDEMAN: Oh, sure. And O'Brien released yesterday the letter to you, or something, where he wants you—

PRESIDENT: To appoint a prosecutor.

HALDEMAN: —A special prosecutor, on all this kind of stuff.

PRESIDENT: Why? Isn't it being prosecuted?

HALDEMAN: Of course it is.

PRESIDENT: Is there any way, any way, that Ehrlichman's crowd can get these people to, to, to plead guilty and get the hell out of the case? Or how is it working there? I don't know what kind of jackassery is going on in the handling of it, you know, because I don't have much confidence in these lawyers. Who's watching that end of it? Is that Dean?

HALDEMAN: Dean. Mitchell.

PRESIDENT: Mitchell. Alright.

HALDEMAN: Very closely watching it. Mardian.

PRESIDENT: Mardian? Okay.

HALDEMAN: Unfortunately, you know, it's one where, I have to agree with you, though it may not be that simple. It would seem to me if they plead them guilty and get them out—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: —They've got to get them, they don't have an indictment yet.

PRESIDENT: Why not?

HALDEMAN: Well, because they keep investigating and uncovering new things, you know, hopefully we've got that turned off.