

Conversation No. 743-7
June 27, 1972, 1:55-2:36 P.M.
Oval Office
President and Rose Mary Woods

[Conversations begins 743-7(b) 1:54:23.0]

PRESIDENT: Got to think of poor John Mitchell, and what he must going through now.

WOODS: I called him Sunday, and told him I felt so sorry for him, and Bob Finch and went by and had a drink with him Sunday night.

PRESIDENT: Oh, sorry about Martha. Does he know you know?

WOODS: It's been in all the papers.

PRESIDENT: Oh, I know that, but does he know you knew about '68?

WOODS: He told me. He's the one that told me about it.

PRESIDENT: Oh, yeah. [Crackling noise makes a few sentences impossible to hear.] Very few people know about it, you and Bob and that's all. [Unclear], Ehrlichman doesn't know about it.

WOODS: [Helen Thomas] is going to let it out. It's a favor.

PRESIDENT: Well— [cross talk]

WOODS: You know, I think that with all these poor people thinking she's getting beat up, and they don't really [unclear] that she is getting beaten by six men, ah, that she is black and blue, and [unclear] a man turned her over when they gave her a shot [unclear.]

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.] Oh, they did.

WOODS: Short [by five men] into her.

PRESIDENT: Well, but they had to—

WOODS: I know, but they did it—

PRESIDENT: She's sick. [tone of protest]

WOODS: I know she's sick, but they—

PRESIDENT: I think they gave her, this was sedation, probably.

WOODS: Sure, but they didn't take five body guards, they weren't body guards that gave her a shot.

[Cross talking.]

PRESIDENT: [Unclear statement regarding Martha's defenders.] Rose, [let her go], she's erratic as hell, neurotic—

WOODS: She's so emotionally unstable. Of course, I, I don't, I don't, I don't know what teed her off completely now except that I didn't think she'd be able to take the move from being in the Cabinet, office, you know, Cabinet wife.

PRESIDENT: Did, but Christ, did she— [tone of protest]

WOODS: No, I, I think it's probably, she did do a lot of good. I'm going to still defend her on that. [Cross talking], [not that] she didn't do any. But, ah, I think sometimes, after getting out of office, she probably felt they were snubbed. Not by you. [Cross talking.]

PRESIDENT: [Unclear,] we've had them at the White House. Every Cabinet we've had, we've had them there.

WOODS: Oh, yes. That's true.

PRESIDENT: And, ah, [unclear.] Well, now, for example she didn't show up at Kleindienst's swearing in [ceremony.]

WOODS: Well, I know, but, you know, Kleindienst being named, she was, she was very angry with you about [that], or whatever. They [unclear.]

PRESIDENT: I didn't know that.

WOODS: Which, which I realized, she, I asked her something, that she said, ah, they asked her what she thought at the time, she didn't have [cross talk]—

PRESIDENT: She didn't want it at the time.

WOODS: —She didn't have anything. I, I think that it, it's sad that we, I think Helen Thomas—

PRESIDENT: A vicious thing to do.

WOODS: —Was just vicious. It—

PRESIDENT: She's never going to get another story from me.

[Rose reported that Thomas had been after her for an interview, looking for stories on the first family, but she was not interested, because reporters never report what you say. The

President says she had done good pieces on Pat and Julie, but Rose's point was well taken. But with Martha, she was not reporting news but "dirty gossip."

WOODS: But my heart does ache for him because now, [it was safe] he could put her away, now, he can't put her away with the whole world watching everything on the front page. And he can't go in and publicly have her declared that way because of young Marty, or at least that's my feeling [unclear.] He won't want to have Marty's mother publically declared mentally incompetent. So he's got one terribly [sick thought.] I just, I [cross talking]—

PRESIDENT: How the hell would he do it?

WOODS: How he handles it, I really don't know.

PRESIDENT: [Very decidedly.]

WOODS: Yeah. And then even when she did that in California, I think he thought it got her quieted down if he said what he did, she'd—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

WOODS: That he'd get the hell out of here as soon as this election is over. You know, he really isn't. He's so dedicated, the only thing he, he really thinks is vital is you be reelected. Poor man! [Nice tweak of her boss.]

PRESIDENT: I know. I want to help him too, I swear.

WOODS: I'll bet you a bucket if he gets through this he'll never go back to Martha.

PRESIDENT: I don't think so.

WOODS: How can he stand it, poor man is—

PRESIDENT: Well, the only thing is the little girl [unclear]—

WOODS: Well, see, he'd have to have her declared incompetent to do that, I'd bet, [unclear.]

PRESIDENT: Humm. [A pained sound.]

WOODS: She was over there when we went over there the other night.

PRESIDENT: Sweet little girl. Is she alright?

WOODS: She, she was, and that's the other thing John was proud of how well she was taking all this. But as I was leaving my house, in Russia, I got one of the kid, that got me one of the little wooden dolls that come apart—

PRESIDENT: Yeah, yeah, I know.

WOODS: And I grabbed me one, and she was so thrilled to have something from Russia. I was delighted I hadn't used that, [unclear] a little girl.

PRESIDENT: Really.

WOODS: But she was helping John, because she was taking it so well.

PRESIDENT: Great. You see the interesting thing is that, it's amazing, how people, how [difficulty] arms a person. You know, Larry O'Brien, I hope he's not freaking out—

WOODS: No, they, they, the gov—

PRESIDENT: They, they, the suspicion. They were at the Watergate, you know, they find another [unclear.]

WOODS: He told me that one time, he told me that one time talking about something. But she was pretty bad then, she didn't know to call the papers, she called the office. And even before that campaign, his life had to be hell on earth before because—

PRESIDENT: You mean before the campaign she, she used to call him?

WOODS: Oh, she used to call, you know, a lot of times, well, they didn't do her right, and he wanted to take her home—

PRESIDENT: [Call at any hour?]

WOODS: She used to call and maybe make him [unclear] back. And sometimes the switchboard operator would call, because I would be there, and she'd say, aaah, Mrs. Mitchell's on the phone, and she's [unclear], and, you know, she'd call, where is that G. D. son-of-a-bitch husband of mine—

PRESIDENT: She'd say that? [With some amazement in his voice.]

WOODS: You know, she'd say that to a switchboard operator. When she was in anger, to anyone. You know what I think it really is, I think it's that old conscience; she took him and she's afraid somebody else will. And she's not stable enough to handle it, that what it is. [The President can be heard taking a metal nail file from his drawer and filing as Rose continued, but the noise of the nail file makes the audio more difficult to hear.] But she really does have sparks of genius at times.

PRESIDENT: She's a, she's a personality.

WOODS: She is. If you just, if there were any way to handle her, to make her know when to keep still, and, of course, when she says she doesn't like it because of all this cops and robbers thing, you know, there are going to be calls saying, she knows a lot, she—

PRESIDENT: Oh, she doesn't know a thing, of course. [Said in a hushed tone.]

WOODS: Oh, I know that.

PRESIDENT: They've got to know, that she doesn't know, I mean, John never advises her of anything [cross talk]—

WOODS: Oh, no, he wouldn't dare, because he knows how she talks.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear] refers to things about herself, that they're watching her.

WOODS: I know. [Unclear.] But that isn't the way that I think they'll take it.

PRESIDENT: Exactly right.

WOODS: Sometime in your reading, I'll put this in your FYI, because it's really—

[Due to the audio overlap, this conversation does not pick up where it left off until it reaches 0:02:55.0 on tape 743c.]

WOODS: —a nice column, "The Loneliest Man In The World: The President." I've got some, I'll put [cross talk] when you go to California—

PRESIDENT: No, I'll [read] it here.

[Rose reports a nice letter from Dick Walters, a note from Admiral Rickover lamenting he'd not spent more time with his wife who had just passed, and other personal correspondence. When Rose reports a long letter from Lou Nichols on the FBI, and the fact that he put someone in charge from the outside (referring to Pat Gray) which Nichols questioned, the president told Rose, "That's temporary." Nixon said that job is not going to be like Hoover, rather every president's going to have his own director. But the conversation returned again to the Mitchells. Conversation ends 0:03:51.0 and Nixon returns to Mitchell at 0:24:53.0.]

PRESIDENT: Poor ol' John, I'm afraid he may be in a box he can't get out of this time, that he can't let her go away. He's got a hell of a lot to deal with, [unclear] pushing him. All, everybody that knows—

WOODS: Maybe he's got, you know, maybe he'll have to put her away, or have a, have a, well, have a doctor say she's had a nervous breakdown, or something.

PRESIDENT: That's all you can say, she's had a nervous breakdown. [Said softly.]

WOODS: Or she's going through change of life. And had—

PRESIDENT: [Cross talking, unclear.]

WOODS: She's going through the usual, happens to a lot of people at this age, I think
[cross talk.]

[They move on to other subjects, with the conversation ending on Mitchell. Rose says the president should say it's a personal matter at his press conference, and the president tells her he will have no problem handling it. They walked out of the office together at 2:36 P.M.]