

Conversation Number 345-10
June 29, 1972, 2:40-3:50 P.M.
Executive Office Building
President and Haldeman

[During his final preparation for the East Room Press Conference, and just before Henry Kissinger joined them in the President's EOB office, the President asked Haldeman about his earlier conversation with John Mitchell. The first discussion of Mitchell lasted less than a minute. The conversation transcribed below originally began at 0:33:02.0 on tape 345a.]

PRESIDENT: What is the [unclear] deal on Mitchell and the discussion?

HALDEMAN: Yeah. He came in, said he wanted to see me. And he gave me a very detailed synopsis of his whole situation. Where it is. It's a very serious situation. And he said the net result is there's no question in his mind the only thing he can do is step down, step out as campaign manager, because Martha's very serious, and not solvable.

[This conversation originally ended at 0:33:43.0. As Haldeman finished this sentence, Kissinger arrived at 3:10 P.M. Six minutes of personal material is redacted, and then the conversation with Henry focused on Vietnam. When Kissinger departed ten minutes later, the conversation returned immediately to Mitchell and Watergate. As Kissinger can be heard closing the door, the President speaks for he is anxious for the rest of the report. The conversation transcribed below originally began at 0:50:02.0.]

PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

HALDEMAN: To put it in a nutshell it really, the situation is serious enough. She is, ah, basically the problem is—

PRESIDENT: Her problem is the, the mental disorder, you know.

HALDEMAN: It's, ah, both mental disorder and al—

PRESIDENT: Alcoholism.

HALDEMAN: —and an enormous consumption of alcohol. She's not an alcoholic. But she gets very very drunk. And she, she, ah, in other words the alcohol comes with the mental disorder. It isn't the cause of it. At least I think that's what John thinks. He says she, she drinks an enormous amount and she become violently irrational, as we know. And she's past the point of no return. He's afraid she's suicidal, and, ah, he's also has enormous respect for her ability to do what she decide to do and turn out [unclear.] She is devoted to you—

PRESIDENT: Incidentally, is she, she aware of Watergate?

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: Alright.

HALDEMAN: That part of what caused his problem is that she, she found out, John didn't tell her that weekend, about the fact that it was out in the papers, and after he left, she found it on television, or something, and read about it in the papers, I think that was exactly what he had done, and she blew her stack about that. And then she went into a big, that was caused the tantrum, she started drinking [Kahlua], putting her hand through a window in the, the hotel, cut her hand all up—

PRESIDENT: Jesus.

HALDEMAN: They did call a doctor, and they did throw her down in the bed and stick a needle in her ass because she—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Because she's, they had to, she was demolishing the, the hotel. Then they had a couple take her to New York, these friends of his, and he went up and spent the Saturday, he said I, there's no way I can do this. And I said, what about putting her where you had her before? I played this all, I saw where he was going, so I went the other way.

PRESIDENT: Absolutely. So he doesn't appear, it doesn't appear we're driving him [out]—

HALDEMAN: He doesn't think that at all. He can't, 'cause I played it all, argue, arguing the other side, saying you need—

PRESIDENT: But she's for me, apparently, which is good.

HALDEMAN: He said that. He said let me emphasize Martha, the one way we can solve this for now if for [cross talking.]

PRESIDENT: Is for me to stop her.

HALDEMAN: The president to call Martha, and says Martha, I know of all the problems and sacrifices, but John is the one indispensable man here, and I've got to have him. But he said, I don't want him to do that, it won't solve the problem [long-term], and there's no way of knowing when the next thing will come up, and it's bound to within a matter of days.

PRESIDENT: Really?

HALDEMAN: Yeah. And he said it just, so there's no point in, in trying. He said, she's told me she going to jump off the balcony at the Watergate. Well, you know, I, I can't be sure she won't.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: If I have to put a guard on her, but not forever, she won't stay there—

PRESIDENT: The problem's John's. He's alright?

HALDEMAN: Alright, yeah. But he's obviously very disturbed.

PRESIDENT: But he's not irrational?

HALDEMAN: No, not at all irrational. He's very calm.

PRESIDENT: Okay.

HALDEMAN: But he's obviously tired.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: And, sort of wrung out.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, well, it's emotional.

HALDEMAN: She's still having big crying tantrums. [Tone for withdrawn material originally from 0:53:14.0 to 0:53:26.0.]

PRESIDENT: Yeah. What's the plan?

HALDEMAN: He said, he said the only solution to this, Martha said to him, John you don't need this. You're out front, and they're blaming you for all these things that happen, and I can't take that. They blame you for these, breaking into the Watergate, and all this stuff, and she said we just don't need it. And you could be just as much help to the president if, consulting, and help him on the sidelines.

PRESIDENT: That's pretty [good].

HALDEMAN: If you would just got out of being in front on this thing, then I'll be all right. And that's the whole thing. And she also, he said, she's not dumb at all.

PRESIDENT: No.

HALDEMAN: John's very matter of fact about all this, very, you know, matter of fact about all this, the problems with her drinking, and all this stuff, and he says she also perceives, she made the point, that there's a plus to be gotten out of my quitting right now, along the lines as the Duke of Windsor—

PRESIDENT: Yeah, did it for the woman I love.

HALDEMAN: That's right. And there's a hell of a lot of Martha Mitchell type people that can say, isn't that a beautiful thing for John to do, by God he's not the [unclear] shit we thought he was. And, ah, he said you wouldn't believe the mail that's pouring in. And

flowers, and stuff. They said there were fifty reporters camped at the Westchester Country Club. Sneaking around every which way, bribing every bell boy and house maid, and everything else, and trying to find out, writing things like she had scrambled eggs for breakfast, [what she was getting] from room service, and all that sort stuff.

PRESIDENT: [Sighs.]

HALDEMAN: So he said, I said can't you lock her up? He said, no, she won't do it. She, that's where she came out with this political prisoner, I won't be a political prisoner. He said, might have done that last time, but Martha's different that she was four years ago, she knows more now.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: And she's a public figure, and knows it. And the press would cover it if you locked her up.

PRESIDENT: Oh, yeah.

HALDEMAN: [He gave me the cold case.] I argued against him. I made the point of his being needed on the big plays, I went through the Rockefeller business, and all that, said just nobody else could handle that—

PRESIDENT: I hope he knows, as far as, I didn't plan it, but it's fortunate that I happen planning [to go to] New Jersey, that's typical of a big play. Who the hell's going to handle Cahill?

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Asshole's [sold]. But Mitchell see?

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Can't leave that to Kliendienst.

HALDEMAN: Mitchell can't figure it out now?

PRESIDENT: Can't?

HALDEMAN: He says the attorney general, just because [wrapping him up], he's, the three guys, the closest, as blood and water, were Cahill, Secretary of State, a guy named [Gott], and the attorney general, they were old cronies, and very very close. Can't understand what happened. Said, what it is, apparently is that the contractor didn't get the

job. And something came out of the civil suit were he was trying to get it, and the facts were brought out that he thought he had a payoff, or something, [along the line of] Watergate.

PRESIDENT: It was a contribution to the party, or something. Shit, [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: There may be a public scandal. They maybe, they may have put it in in order to clear it, you know, or something, but anyway. John, said I've got to get out, the sooner the better, I'm starting to explain to Martha, he said I've had to tell her I'm going to leave, make sure to keep her alive while I [unclear]—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: And she said, he, you know, I've said a couple of time if we do this it will be fine, every time she interrupts and says, not yet. She's all ready to sell the apartment, she's ready to move to New York.

PRESIDENT: Alright.

HALDEMAN: And, ah, I said, if you did that would you be able to come down here? He said, oh, hell yes, once I get her up there, and get out of the campaign. Probably be eager—

PRESIDENT: Probably spend more time.

HALDEMAN: Yeah. He said, you don't realize, nor does the president, understand how much time I've had to spend keeping Martha on an even keel, that hasn't hampered my ability to run the campaign, up until now, and it will be worse. Said, so [cross talking.]

PRESIDENT: To arrange the president, presidential campaign in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California?

HALDEMAN: I said handling the major, or handling the major, major moves, and all that, and he said I can do whatever you want me to. He said I can do whatever you want me to, once I get out of this thing, and, but I can't do it as a front man, we can't put up a sign say John Mitchell [Head Of] New York. Run it some other way, but let me in the back door. And I'll tell the players that's what I am going to do, and that's no problem. Ah, I said, well what are the alternatives in that scenario up there, or is there no point in pursuing. He said I'm not confronting you with a problem you've got to make a decision on, I'm telling you what has to happen because there isn't any other way out. So, that was prefect. He now feels that—

PRESIDENT: [I think it's set up successfully.]

* On June 28, 1972 Paul Sherwin, New Jersey's secretary of state and a close friend of Governor William Cahill, was indicted on charges of extortion and bribery by both federal and state prosecutors. Also indicted were William Loughran, and Republican fund raiser and Michael Manzo, the head of a construction company. Sherwin and Loughran were charges with extorting \$10,000 from Manzo in exchange for a state contract with a kickback to the New Jersey GOP. All were convicted on October 28, 1972. Fact On File, *Yearbook*, 1972, 640 and 1070.

HALDEMAN: I said this is a monumental problem for me, as well as it is for the president. He said, well, go tell it to the president today because he's got a televised press conference. We can have a meeting on it tomorrow morning. I said well he'll probably ask me what we were talking about, you know. [He said, well, just tell him about, brief him on the problem and all and I can make a recommendation to him on it tomorrow.]

PRESIDENT: Good.

HALDEMAN: But I thought I would just fill you in, [indirectly], so you'd know.

PRESIDENT: To get the tone of my answer, but if I get something on this I'll handle it very discreetly anyway, but this helps to know—

HALDEMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: What the hell he going to do.

[Conversation interrupted with an almost five minute tone for withdrawn material. When the conversation resumed, Watergate was under discussion. Withdrawal on the original tape from 0:59:08.0 to 1:04:05.0.]

PRESIDENT: We have two things, we have two things this accomplishes, which is, first, it gets rid of, frankly, a liability, it's, it's, with John, it's hard to carry John on this, we know its not is fault. I frankly believe that if it had not been for Martha, he probably wouldn't have let this Watergate thing get out of hand.

HALDEMAN: That's quite possible.

PRESIDENT: And actually I don't think, I really don't I think he's [knew about this], I really don't. I said, John, said to me, one of the lower guys said to John we're preparing to get information. He said, well, don't tell me anything about it, you know, that's the way you do. Thinking probably they were going to do it the way you always do, planting a person on the other side, which everybody does. But these assholes were going around bugging people or whatever it was, I don't know. [Pause.] My view on that is that, that pretty well kills Watergate. I mean, I mean as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't cover Watergate.

HALDEMAN: Which is another good thing, and John raised that, he said, if this thing escalates, I think it would be very good if I'm out of the place now, and you could say, well, there's an all new team over there—

PRESIDENT: I don't know about any of that crap [unclear.]

HALDEMAN: They fired Liddy.

PRESIDENT: Huh?

HALDEMAN: They fired Liddy.

PRESIDENT: The guy who did it?

HALDEMAN: The contact, yeah.

PRESIDENT: How? On what grounds, he going to blow the [act]?

HALDEMAN: Nope. Because he's, he won't. He was, part of the plan to fire him, he agreed to be fired.

PRESIDENT: We agree to take care of him [some way]? [Holy shit.]

HALDEMAN: [Tape whip, unclear.]

PRESIDENT: On what ground did they fire him? They're going to say that he had some, in the event it comes out that he did have contact with—

HALDEMAN: Yeah. They're not making any fuss about it. Nobody will ask why they fired him unless he becomes identified. The FBI, [they] do have a line to him. They have questioned him and he didn't cooperate. He answered certain questions and then they got into other areas and he said, if you're going to get into that kind of area, then I request to have an attorney here. The FBI said, well, if you have an attorney he'll tell you not to answer the question. Liddy said, well then, I've got to [unclear] advised to do, and the FBI dropped it.

PRESIDENT: [What are they, the questions?]

HALDEMAN: [Name what other people involved.]

PRESIDENT: [Unclear,] Democrats or Republicans.

HALDEMAN: The thing that bothers me about this thing is that it's a time bomb. It, it's, ah, [unclear], they don't have to keep it alive. They can let it go under the surface. They can investigate until they get something else, and then lob it out whenever they feel like it.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Well, what do we do, then?

HALDEMAN: I don't know. I don't think there's a damn thing we can do, except follow it, [unclear] it.

PRESIDENT: Mitchell [unclear]?

HALDEMAN: Not to my knowledge.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Unless a full-blown quote, “I was running the thing at the time and I should have known what was happening, I’m sorry I didn’t.”

PRESIDENT: “But I didn’t know it.”

HALDEMAN: “I was diverted by some personal problems, which is why I’ve resigned from the program, because I wasn’t able to spend the time and attention, we needed for it.”

PRESIDENT: How does the resignation thing, how do you think it goes in terms of timing?

HALDEMAN: The resignation is going to be a positive story. It’s going to hang it totally on Martha.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. I think he should do it. Call in the press, let ‘em [unclear.] Over here?

HALDEMAN: No, sir. But he should come over and talk to you first.

PRESIDENT: Then do it. And then he can say on my recommendation, you know, about the announcement, on my recommendation.

HALDEMAN: I think he ought to cover that.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

HALDEMAN: Got to talk to Frank Dale, that’s one of the things we got to workout. Dale is, as you know, the Chairman of the Committee.

[The conversation turned to sending Clark MacGregor and Fred Malek over to run the day to day operations of the committee, which both thought would be good. There would be a change in attitude. There would be a slight delay, because MacGregor had a heavy load with his White House congressional relations office that would need completing before he went to the committee. They next discussed the president’s schedule, the forthcoming trip to California, pending legislation, the hiring of East Wing employees for the First Family, and a comparison of John Mitchell’s role in the 1972 campaign with Secretary of Treasury John Connally after his resignation.]

PRESIDENT: A great load will be lifted.

HALDEMAN: That’s it.

PRESIDENT: Then he’ll come in as an adviser, you know, something like Connally. Connally’s likely to be better than John.

[Tone for withdrawn material. The conversation originally ended at 1:08:56.0.]

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