

Conversation Number 744-22
June 30, 1972, 3:18-3:34 P.M.
Oval Office
President and Ziegler

[In a brief discussion of an afternoon press briefing by Attorney General Kleindienst, Ron Zeigler suggests it may not be a good day for such a briefing because of the problem brewing in the press room. The conversation transcribed below originally began at 1:53:47.0 on tape 744b.]

ZIEGLER: There, there, you know, there's this new Hunt development, so there's sort of an agitated group out there.

PRESIDENT: What's the Hunt development? They find him now?

ZIEGLER: Well, involving the fact they found a gun and a map somewhere in his desk in the EOB, so I handled that today, so the problem, you put the attorney general out there, you see—

PRESIDENT: A gun and a map in Hunt's desk? [Tone of alarm and disbelief.]

ZIEGLER: Right.

PRESIDENT: Map of what?

ZIEGLER: The Democratic National Headquarters.

PRESIDENT: Oh, Christ. [Tone of disgust.]

ZIEGLER: Well, in any event, that, that—

[The president explains that the reason for Kleindienst giving a briefing was because of the Supreme Court's ruling on the death penalty, and he asked Zeigler:] Have you sent the memo on that? Zeigler has not, but he is concerned that if Kleindienst briefs the press on anything, it will open him to questions on Watergate. The president agrees, but he says he wants the story out that they want to apply the death penalty in kidnappings, hijacking cases and killing of police officers, which can be done next week. The president wants to know how the Hunt matter arose.]

ZIEGLER: Well, it's a source story in the [Washington] *Daily News*, the source story. And it said that, ah, Hunt's desk was in the Colson suite, and that in that they found a gun, and a map of the Democratic headquarters, and bugging devices such as those that were found in that case. Well, so they to me with the question of how'd they find it? I said obviously I am not going to comment on a matter that's under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, number one, the first day we, this question came to us, we made it very clear the White House has not been involved, number two—

PRESIDENT: You comment on the fact this was found in his desk two months after he left the White House?

ZIEGLER: No. Well, whenever they investigated it over there. Number two, we made clear that Mr. Colson was in no way involved.

PRESIDENT: That's right. He went out and talked to them, okay?

ZIEGLER: Not to the press.

PRESIDENT: Oh, well, he was investigated, though. He had some questions?

ZIEGLER: Well, I didn't get into that—

PRESIDENT: That's what I meant. He, he has, ah, responded to questions.

ZIEGLER: Then we went through the typical Q and A type thing. Finally I said, “Look, fellows,” I said, “I think it was most inappropriate, in the light of a source story that is not based on any official statement that has been made by the investigating authorities for you to associate in this room in the White House the name of a White House official with this particular story, particularly when we have already made very clear, the President has made it clear and I have made it clear, that there is no association whatsoever.”

PRESIDENT: Well—

ZIEGLER: Now, I've talked with Dean. The FBI is going to make an official statement on this thing and Dean—

PRESIDENT: What are they going to say?

ZIEGLER: —Told me that the story's inaccurate.

PRESIDENT: Inaccurate or accurate?

ZIEGLER: It was inaccurate, which I did not know. At least he feels it is, which I didn't know in the briefing, of course. But if they come out with this, it's going to undercut the, the—

PRESIDENT: Well, when will Dean, when will the FBI get that out?

ZIEGLER: Well, we're trying to get them to move on it right away.

[The conversation originally ended at 1:57:24.0. Based on this information, it was agreed that Ziegler would not use Kliendienst at the afternoon briefing and he departed at 3:24 P.M.]