

Conversation Number 746-3  
July 1, 1972, 8:50-9:45 A.M.  
Oval Office  
President and Colson

[Following a passing reference to John Mitchell's resignation, a critique of Vice President Agnew's less than efficient press releasing operation, a few cracks at the press in general and the White House press corps in particular, and Social Security legislation, this rambling exchange became more focused when it turned to the report about the contents of Hunt's safe. During this conversation, the dark, consistorial president surfaced, encouraging his hatchet man, Colson, who can be heard making notes of the president's plotting a nefarious counter-plot to blame the Democrats for breaking into the Republican National Committee when they had done no such thing. The conversation transcribed below originally began at 0:10:24.0.]

PRESIDENT: It's interesting that [*Washington Daily News*] story [about the contents of Howard Hunt's White House safe] is totally, I mean, it's an exaggeration. Almost, there must be somebody over there planting something like that.

COLSON: I think there is.

PRESIDENT: That can't be right. I mean, after all, they, the map deal. There's no map there, frankly.

COLSON: No map there.

PRESIDENT: Of course, the gun and the walkie-talkie, well, Christ, that's nothing, the guy just probably didn't put it in his briefcase. He's that kind of a guy, I imagine.

COLSON: He, he—

PRESIDENT: That's just a hunch.

COLSON: He carried a gun for years. Well, he kept it, he didn't keep it in his desk. He had it locked in a safe.

PRESIDENT: In case of an emergency.

COLSON: [Chuckling.] He's wanted in a few Latin American countries. The tragedy of it, Mr. President, was that I never have been in his office, so I didn't know whether the story that ran in the *Daily News* was true or not, except that it said his office was in mine, which it isn't.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

COLSON: But the point is if I had known that it was untrue, I'd have had Justice deny it early in the day, rather than let it run all day. It ran all day on the wires.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, well—

COLSON: It wasn't 'til late afternoon that—

PRESIDENT: It was not on any of the networks?

COLSON: No, no. They didn't even mention it in the *Post* this morning.

PRESIDENT: [Cross talking] The lawyers, and so forth, they're going to [have fun] on the lawsuit.

COLSON: [ABC News anchor] Howard Smith, he said, I still think it's a seven-day wonder.

PRESIDENT: Well, it may be, but you see, they're still investigating charges, the money, they're going to find out, and the question is when they get finally to, they're going to find out that the money came from some Republican source, as you well know. Some Republicans felt very interested in the cause of these Cubans. I'd put in the fact that the Cubans, scared to death of McGovern, and sure, there were Republicans, there were eager beavers in the campaign committee that were, that were involved.

COLSON: The Cubans, the Cubans, Mr. President, are very afraid of McGovern. You know, he, he wrote what I would regard as a very innocuous letter about, we'll treat all Latin American countries alike, and they took off on that. And I sent it to Bebe.

PRESIDENT: [President opening and closing desk drawer, unclear few words, then silence while the president may have been sipping coffee.] Ah, I don't think they have thought of it, but, you know, they should be, maybe what they wanted to do was to get in and sort of get at files, as retribution [unclear.] I was thinking that if they error, I would consider it an error, anyway, if the could get in one night [unclear.]

COLSON: Right.

PRESIDENT: And, ah—

COLSON: Mess things up a bit.

PRESIDENT: Yes. [Unclear.] No, I think this is not, this is [unclear], the way to handle, it would have to be handled in a way that, it seems to me, it does seem to me that, it does look to me, Chuck, that this looks like [unclear] the Democrats.

COLSON: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: My point is they've been trying to bug us, everybody knows that, that's why Mitchell hired these people. And if they have, what would you think if that happened?

COLSON: I think it would be very helpful if they came in one morning and found fries strewn all over the floor.

PRESIDENT: Sure. And some missing.

COLSON: Something missing. Which they have been missing over here, and that, that was in this morning's paper.

PRESIDENT: The campaign?

COLSON: They've had several campaign files missing. Of course, we know that to be true because we went through one day trying to track something back that we were concerned about in the ITT case, and something had been taken. This goes on in every campaign.

PRESIDENT: Oh, Jesus.

COLSON: It's just these fellows did it in a very—

PRESIDENT: Stupid way.

COLSON: Stupid way. But, if—

PRESIDENT: Wasn't bright. [Angry tone.] I mean, if something could be very open. But I mean demolished, do \$3,000, \$4,000 worth of damage, you know what I mean?

COLSON: That would have a very, that would have a very good effect.

PRESIDENT: Right during their convention.

COLSON: During theirs or during ours?

PRESIDENT: Theirs. [Unclear.]

COLSON: Then Dole is in a perfect position to say—

PRESIDENT: Sue. They could sue the committee, sue the committee. They sued him about it.

COLSON: We have that one under control. It's being postponed. We think it will be dismissed.

PRESIDENT: Excellent. Well, I'd sue them. But, however. But what I meant is it should be, it'll be, there should be a rifling or missing files, something where, where it's really torn up, where pictures could be taken. They'll charge it's been done by the Republicans, so what the hell. For Christ's sakes—

COLSON: We didn't charge that when your place—

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: Financial files, I think. Financial files would be the kind of thing they would love to get their hands on, there'd be a real motive for that.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, that's obvious, clearly. [Brief silence.] You consider Hunt to be reliable, don't you?

COLSON: Always has been, yes.

PRESIDENT: You've known him for years?

COLSON: Yes, sir. I've known him since—

PRESIDENT: How about McCord? Is he reliable?

COLSON: Never met him or know anything about him. I would doubt it, from what I have heard.

PRESIDENT: What do you think? Wasn't he in the CIA, too, with Hunt?

COLSON: Different areas, I believe.

PRESIDENT: Why do you doubt him?

COLSON: Ah, just the way he is, ah—

PRESIDENT: He has other clients.

COLSON: Yeah, and the money arrangements. I mean, Hunt is not, you see, Hunt in all the things he did for us never cared about the money. He just wanted to help. He's an ideologue. You read his books and all of his books have a political message, which is pretty conservative. I always trust someone whose beliefs are

PRESIDENT: I agree.

COLSON: And not someone who's just in there for a buck.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: Howard, Howard would die for something he believes in, he damn near did several times.

PRESIDENT: McCord you think may be—

COLSON: Just, I've never met him, but just the ring of it, the \$4,000 a month contract,

setting up an office.

PRESIDENT: \$4,000 with whom?

COLSON: With us, with the committee, the National Committee.

PRESIDENT: To do what?

COLSON: Security.

PRESIDENT: I think that's a stupid thing to do. I don't think security is worth that much. Do you?

COLSON: Well, it is if you it is if you do it right.

PRESIDENT: Oh, shit. The best security is for the individual himself to carry his own stuff and never have anything around.

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: I even do it here, you know, I don't leave anything around that I really, really am concerned about. I don't do it.

COLSON: No. Memos that are very sensitive, I either carry them in here and lock them up at night in a safe. I agree, I totally. Hunt is a fellow who I would trust. I mean, he's a true believer, a real patriot. My God, the things he's done for his country. It's just a tragedy that he gets smeared with this. Of course, the other story that a lot of people have bought is that Howard Hunt was taken out of the country by the CIA. Well, he's certainly done a lot hot stuff. Oh, Jesus, he pulled a lot of very sensitive stuff in the sixties.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.] If anything ever happens to him, be sure that he blows the whistle, the whole Bay of Pigs.

COLSON: He wrote the book.

PRESIDENT: Blow their horn.

COLSON: He tells quite a story, coming in here during that period citing and pleading with Kennedy.

[At 0:19:44.0 on the tape, Butterfield entered the office for the president to sign a document at 9:05 A.M. When he left, the conversation turned to McGovern's position on the economy, various pending legislative matters, the president's press conference three days earlier and several other topics ranging from French POW to Welfare.]