

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A TELEPHONE
CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND
JOHN EHRLICHMAN ON APRIL 14, 1973 FROM
11:22 TO 11:53 P.M.

APRIL 14, 1973, FROM 11:22 TO 11:53 P.M.

20

PRESIDENT: Uh, and uh, damn it. I'm, I'm, I'm that kind of person. I'm not one that's gonna, gonna, gonna say, "Look, before this guy's under attack. I, I, I, I, I'd drop 'em."

EHRLICHMAN: Um.

PRESIDENT: Don't you, uh, is there something to be said for that or not?

EHRLICHMAN: Uh, I don't think uh' number one I don't think you'd gain anything by it, if a problem doesn't go awry.

PRESIDENT: No, they'll say, "Oh, Jesus that does show that Nixon here is, here is top person, the closest man to him? in the office four or five hours a day, and out he goes."

EHRLICHMAN: Yep.

PRESIDENT: But, Christ everything must be wrong.

EHRLICHMAN: Yep, that's it.

PRESIDENT: and, and.

EHRLICHMAN: ...then separate the Siamese twins.

PRESIDENT: We've done so many good things, you know, which Bob has worked on so arduously and uh, God damn it, so there will be, there will be fragments here and there, but Christ we, people, make mistakes. You don't fire a guy for a mistake, do you?

EHRLICHMAN: No

PRESIDENT: No, not for a, not for a well intentioned mistake.

EHRLICHMAN: No, that's right, that's right.

PRESIDENT: But, uh, I just uh, my whole view of drawing up the line. At one point you're going to talk to Dean.

EHRlichman: I am. I, I...

PRESIDENT: What are you going to say to him?

EHRlichman: Well, I'm gonna try and get him, I'm gonna try and get him around a bit, it's going to be delicate.

PRESIDENT: Get him around in what way?

EHRlichman: Well to uh, to uh, get off this uh, passing the buck business. It's...

PRESIDENT: ...John, that's...

EHRlichman: ...It's a little touchy and I don't...

PRESIDENT: John, that's...

EHRlichman: ...and I don't know how far I can go.

PRESIDENT: ...not going to, uh, that's not going to help you. Look, he's gotta look down the road to, to one point, that, uh, there's only one man that could restore him to the ability to practice law in the case things still go wrong.

EHRlichman: Um hum. Um hum.

PRESIDENT: Now that uh, uh, he's got to have that in the back of his mind.

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: And he's got to know that'll happen. You know, I don't, you don't tell him

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: but you know and I know that

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: with him and Mitchell, there isn't gonna be a God damn question. Because we got a bum rap. God damn it if Lipschitz gets off with a...

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: ...with copping a plea...

EHRlichman: (Laughs)

PRESIDENT: ...and, and, and getting a suspended sentence, what in the name of Christ is this all about. well" what it involves, of course, we have to be fair, it involves, uh, the highest...

EHRlichman: The king of the mountain...

PRESIDENT: The king of the mountain...

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: ...the, uh, trying to keep, uh, suppress the facts and so forth. I do, and I think you thought I was sort of, sort of being facetious about saying get everybody, all these people and this includes LaRue, and Mardian and of course uh, of course Kalmbach. Uh, they've gotta have it and Dean too. They've gotta have a straight damn line that, of course we raised money. Be very honest about it. But, uh, we raised money for a purpose that we thought was perfectly proper.

EHRlichman: Um hum. Uh hum.

PRESIDENT: But we didn't want to shut 'em up. These men were guilty.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Right?

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: And uh, they are, we weren't trying to shut them up, we just didn't, we didn't want 'em to talk to the press.

EHRlichman: Yeah, yeah.

PRESIDENT: That's perfectly legitimate, isn't it? Or is it? Legitimate not to want them to talk to the press.

EHRlichman: I think it is. I uh, I, I don't have a perfect understanding of the, of the law on that and I...

PRESIDENT: You'd say that old Dick was really shaken?

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: He really was.

PRESIDENT: God damn it. I, I told him once, I said, "Dick, I said, the real target here is Mitchell." He said, "Oh no, it can't be." You know, now, he's sort of got the idea, I think, that probably it's Haldeman or Colson.

EHRlichman: Well, he uh, he, I'm sure he's going to call me first thing in the morning.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. But with him I would be very tough, I'd say, "Dick, uh, let's not crap around, I mean, they're after Mitchell and they're going to get him, at the present time. At least that's what our evidence, that's what, what our information...

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: "...indicates

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: ...and so here's where we go."

EHRlichman: And he's probably doing a little checking with his U.S. Attorney tonight.

PRESIDENT: He'd do that?

EHRlichman: Oh sure, sure. He has to make the ultimate prosecutive decision or else he has to del, delegate it to somebody. So he's entitled to know-

PRESIDENT: Your point is that he would delegate to the Dean. I think the Dean is the best one to delegate it to.

EHRlichman: Yeah, I do too.

PRESIDENT: Rather than you know, rather than, John, the suggestion that well you resign and then we'll put another Attorney General. That would be a,...

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: ...that would be a hell of an admission that Christ, that we thought...

EHRlichman: He, he isn't gonna want to do that would be my guess. He isn't gonna want to resign at this point.

PRESIDENT: He shouldn't, uh, you know, when I come to think about it. I think that he should for other reasons. But uh, Jesus, if we could get the Ellsberg case over, I'd just like to get that FBI guy.

EHRlichman: Um hum, uh hum.

PRESIDENT: Is there any way at all that you can? You're going to talk to Ziegler-that you can get out the fact that you, you have conducted a thorough investigation?

EHRlichman: We'll work on that. I think there is.

PRESIDENT: I think we have to get that out...

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...don't you?

EHRlichman: I think so.

President: The President is calling the signals.

EHRlichman: I, I suspect that somebody's going to put it together. I, my, hunch is the New York Times will. They're going to put together, you see, they have the story that Colson was in yesterday.

President: And they know that Mitchell was in.

EHRlichman: And, of course, the, all the wires have that Mitchell was in today.

President: They have? Um hum.

EHRlichman: So, uh, somebody's going to start stringing all this together.

President: And so what would happen? You'd have Ziegler or yourself go out and say, "Yes, I have seen them." Or you, haven't thought that through.

EHRlichman: Well, I think I'd, I wouldn't have to say I'd seen them. I could a, we could a, say that uh we, we've had a job of work going on for several weeks .

President: But you can say that the President, because of the charges that have been made, wanted an independent investigation made. And he ordered, directed you to make it.

EHRlichman: Um hum.

President: You've made an independent investigation of the situation, because the President wants, if there's anybody is, who is guilty in this thing, he said, uh, he must through the Judicial processes be brought to, brought to the bar. Is that what you'd say?

EHRlichman: Yep. Well, or, or simply to aid you in uh, in uh, analyzing the steps that ought to be taken here. You're, you're being asked to do a lot...

PRESIDENT: You could say the President...

EHRlichman: ...of quite extraordinary things.

PRESIDENT: You could say, "The President, President wants this matter cleaned up, once and for all."

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: It's been hanging around and yacked about and innocent people have been hurt in the process...

EHRlichman: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...and charges are being throwing around now we've got a Judicial process and we want this thing...

EHRlichman: Beyond that...

PRESIDENT: ...finished.

EHRlichman: ...beyond that you've had all kinds of Senators and Congressmen calling for the appointment of uh,...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...of uh, special commissions and all that kind of thing...

PRESIDENT: So you're it.

EHRlichman: ...for, for, uh' you uh, to come to any sort of a judgment on those kinds of proposals you have to, have a pretty clear understanding of the facts.

PRESIDENT: Right. Well, with Dean, I think you could talk to him in confidence about uh, about a thing like that, don't you? He isn't gonna...

EHRlichman: I'm not sure. I, I just don't know how, how much to lean on...

PRESIDENT: I see.

EHRlichman: ...that reed at the moment. But, uh, I'll sound it out.

PRESIDENT: Well, you start with the proposition, "Dean, uh, the President thinks you've just been a' you know, you've carried a tremendous load and he has, his affection and loyalty to you is just undiminished..."

EHRlichman: Alright.

PRESIDENT: "...And uh, now let's see where the hell we go and..."

EHRlichman: Uh Hum.

PRESIDENT: "...we can't get the President involved in this." His people, just, I mean that's one thing we don't want to cover up, but uh...

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: ...uh, there are ways that he can and then he's got to say that, that, for example, you start with him certainly on the business of the obstruction of justice.

EHRlichman: That's right. That's right.

PRESIDENT: Say, "Look John, let's, we need a plan here..."

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: "...And uh,..."

EHRlichman: Um hum.

PRESIDENT: "...so that uh, so that LaRue, Mardian and a, a, the others." I mean Christ, uh...

EHRlichman: Well. I'm not sure I can go that far with him.

PRESIDENT: No. He can't make the plan up

EHRlichman: (Unintelligible) I'll sound it out.

PRESIDENT: Right. Well, get a good night's sleep.

EHRlichman: Thank you sir.

PRESIDENT: I'll bet you do...

EHRlichman: Alright.

PRESIDENT: ...sleep well. And if you don't have a way, it's a curious thing, uh, not curious at all but uh, John it's, it's, it's just, it's well, it's terribly painful of course, and I was thinking you know, to have, to go to that damn dinner tonight.

EHRlichman: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: But my point is, well, it is painful and I just feel better about getting the God damn thing done.

EHRlichman: Good.

PRESIDENT: Or, or do you agree?

EHRlichman: Absolutely.

PRESIDENT: And after all, I'm, it's my job and I don't want this, I don't want the Presidency tarnished, but also I don't, I, I, I'm a law enforcement man.

EHRlichman: Yep.

PRESIDENT: And, right?

EHRlichman: Yep, and you've got to move on to more important things.