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THE PRESIDENT'S

CASSETTE RECORDING

OF HIS RECOLLECTIONS

OF HIS MEETING

WITH MESSRS. DEAN

AND HALDEMAN ON

MARCH 21, 1973

ITEM 5.2

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE WATERGATE SPECIAL PROSECUTION FORCE
OF THE PRESIDENT'S CASSETTE RECORDING OF HIS RECOLLECTIONS OF
HIS MEETING WITH MESSRS. DEAN AND HALDEMAN ON MARCH 21, 1973

As far as the day was concerned it was relatively uneventful except for the, uh, talk with Dean. Dean really, in effect, let it all hang out when he said that there was a cancerous growth around the President that simply was going to continue to grow and that we had probably to cut it out now rather than to let it grow and destroy us later. He obviously is very depressed and doesn't really see anything, other course of action open, but to, uh, move to let, uh, uh, the facts out. Paragraph.

As I examined him it, uh, seems that he feels even he would be guilty of some, uh, criminal pro. . . uh, liability due to the fact that he, uh, participated in the actions which, uh, resulted in taking care of the defendants while they were, uh, under trial. Uh, as he pointed out, uh, what is causing him concern is that everyone of the various participants is now getting his own counsel and that this is going to cause considerable problems because it will be each man for himself, and, uh, one will not be afraid to rat on the other. As a matter of fact, Haldeman backed him up in this respect, when, uh, he mentioned the fact that, uh, even Magruder would bring Haldeman down if he would, uh, if he felt he himself was to go down. Haldeman said he agreed. Uh, the Haldeman selection on Magruder is still a very hard one for me to figure out. He's, he's made very few mistakes, but this is one case where Rose was right; he picked a rather weak man who had all the appearance of character, but who really lacks it when the, uh, chips are down. It seemed to me in my talk with Dean that the idea of a grand jury had,

uh, much to, uh, be said for it. Yet, after he, Haldeman and Ehrlichman had met, they came back and said they'd been around the track and felt that that would be a mistake. Ehrlichman did not feel, for example, that a grand jury or some sort of a special panel which Dean thought could be set up, uh, would be able to grant immunity. Uh, the grand jury appealed to me because, uh, it seemed to me this would be much better to have the White House people appear before a grand jury with some rules of evidence than to, uh, be forced, uh, eventually to appear before a committee of the Congress where there would be none. Of course, the other option is for them not to appear at all, but this puts the buck right back on the President, as Dean pointed out, and leaves, uh, not only the aura of cover-up, but also a, uh, very great danger that somebody like Hu. . . Hunt is going to blow. Paragraph.

Hunt seems to be a real problem. According to, uh, Dean, what really concerned him was that somebody approached him, Hunt's lawyer, at some party and said that Hunt needed a 100 thousand dollars or so to pay his lawyer and handle other things or he was going to have some things to say that would be very detrimental to Colson and Ehrlichman, et al. This is, uh, Dean recognizes, is pure blackmail. Of course, Hunt's in a pretty bad position on this because it would expose him to another charge, but I suppose that what he might be figure is that if he, uh, turned state's evidence, he could, uh, go free himself. Paragraph.

I feel for all of the people involved here because they were all, as I pointed out to them in the meeting in the EOB this afternoon, involved for the very best of motives. Uh, I don't think that, uh, certainly Haldeman or Ehrlichman had any

idea about bugging. I, I, of course, know Dean didn't. He, in fact, pointed out that when Liddy at first presented this scheme, it was so wild that Mitchell sat puffing his pipe rather chuck, er, rather, uh, uh, chuckling all the while, that Dean had then pointed out, uh, later to Ehrlichman, that, to, uh, Mitchell that they had to get off of this kick right away. Uh, then came the, uh, real cruncher. Apparently what had happened is that Colson, with Liddy and Hunt in his office, called Magruder and told him in February to get off his ass and start doing something about, uh, setting up some kind of an operation. Uh, this involvement by Colson, of course, is, uh, was perhaps the very best intentioned, and it may be that he is telling the literal truth when he says he doesn't know what they were going to do in terms of bugging, etc. Yet, uh, Colson was always pushing terribly hard for action, and in this instance, uh, pushed so hard that, uh, Liddy, et al., were following their natural inclinations, uh, went, uh, the extra step which got them into serious trouble. Period, paragraph.

I learned for the first time that, uh, Ehrlichman apparently had sent Hunt and his crew out to check into Ellsberg, uh, to see something about his, uh, check something about his, uh, uh, psychiatric problem with his doctor or something like that. That seemed to me to be a very curious junket for Ehrlichman to be involved in. Ehrlichman says that, uh, he was 3 or 4 steps away from it, but apparently Krogh has a problem here because Krogh did answer one question to the effect that he did not know the Cubans which, of course, puts him in a straight position of perjury. This, of course, would be a terrible tragedy because Krogh, uh, was involved in national security work at the time, had nothing whatever to do with Watergate, and the whole Ellsberg business

uh, was something that was undertaken solely for the purpose of, uh, attempting to get information which would be helpful in, um, working up some, the government's case, uh, on the, uh, Pentagon Papers. It seems that Strachan has been a real, uh, courageous fellow through all this. He, apparently, certainly had knowledge of the informa. . . , of the matter, and, uh, according to, uh, uh, uh, Dean, uh, Strachan apparently transferred the \$300,000 or so that Haldeman had, that was left to Haldeman after the 1969 campaign -- 68 campaign -- had transferred it back to the Committee. Um, I don't think that this is the problem that Dean seems to think it is, but of course he's, has to warn against every loose end that might come out, particularly in view of some of the things that have come out up to this point. They are going to meet with Mitchell in the morning and I, uh, hope that Mitchell will really put his mind to this thing and, perhaps, out of it all can come some, some sort of a course of action we can follow. Uh, it seems to me just to hunker down without making any kind of a statement is really, uh, too dangerous as far. . . . [59-second silence] I got over to the house, uh, quite late. . . .