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CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA NEWS CONFERENCE 5/1/74

My new duties in the Senate kept me from getting away as promptly as I had hoped. There was a possibility of one or two tie votes. I didn't want to miss the first one of any consequence, so I stayed and nothing developed. But it was close enough to warrant the hour or so delay. It is nice to be here in Jim Martin territory and I'll be glad to answer any questions.

- Q - In your opinion, should the House Judiciary Committee be satisfied with the transcripts released by the President, or should the Committee have full access to the subpoenaed tapes?
- A - I think the House Committee on the Judiciary ought to be satisfied with the evidence the President's turned over. I think it is well to point out that out of the 40 some tapes that they have requested, they already have 19 in their hands. So the difference between 19 and 40 some is the transcriptions and those transcriptions under the President's agreement can be verified by the Chairman and the ranking Republican member of that Committee and I don't think that's a very onerous task because you sit there with a transcript and you hear the tape, you can easily verify whether it's accurate or inaccurate. So, in my opinion the Committee ought to be satisfied with the arrangement.
- Q - Mr. Vice President, have you read any of the transcripts?
- A - I have the 1350 page document with me. I stayed up until about 2:00 last night and was a little busy today and I read some on the plane coming down. I read probably some 150 to 200 pages, I'll hope to read some going back. But I've read a number of the summaries, so I'm reasonably familiar with the pertinent portions that are in there if you would like to ask any questions.
- Q -
- A - There is no question in my mind that the documentation which has now been made available to the American people directly and to the news media and to the Committee without a qualification in my judgment proves the President is innocent and exonerates him of any involvement in either the planning of Watergate or any cover-up.
- Q - How can you say that when you have only read one hundred pages of the transcript?
- A - Well, I've had the benefit of the scrutinizing eyes of our news media who always put the worst foot forward and the net result is I've read the worst and if the worst is produced by the news media doesn't change my mind, in my humble judgment, the President is totally innocent and completely exonerated.

Q -

A - Let me answer that because I think I am familiar with what you are talking about. Sometime (interruption by newsman)

I don't use your term, sir. I'm glad you agree that the term you used was not the right term because it wasn't. The effort was made in I think the summer of 1972 when the Patman Committee was involved in some of these transactions involving some donations down in Mexico as I recall and the Patman Committee because of some really tenuous Committee jurisdiction wanted to get into the Watergate situation. I was asked by several members on the Republican side of the House Committee on Banking and Currency to call the group together on our side of the aisle to discuss what should be our political strategy in those hearings or meetings that were to follow. At the request of several members on our side, I called the Republicans together and there were several meetings held. Now let me say categorically to my best knowledge, I had no conversations with, no communication or meeting with Maury Stans. And, I only did what I had a responsibility to do as the ranking or the Republican leader in the House of Representatives.

Q -

A - To coordinate the Republican effort in a committee or on the Floor. In this case, it was simply to call the Republicans together for them on that committee to make the decision as to what they would do in the Committee.

Q -

A - Oh no, I refuse to accept your words. I mean you're trying to put words in my mouth which are inaccurate and the purpose was for the Republicans to decide whether Mr. Patman's Committee had jurisdiction. And if his committee had jurisdiction, the Republicans would have cooperated. But his Committee in this case didn't have jurisdiction and I regret exceedingly your trying to put words in my mouth which are totally inaccurate.

Q -

A - Not at all, not at all. Because if you will recall from reading the rest of the March 21 tape, the President at the conclusion after discussing all alternatives, acting as the devil's advocate in the conversation with Mr. Dean and Mr. Haldeman said, we will not do it, it's wrong. And we will not participate. So, even though in the course of an hour or two of give and take where the President was trying to be the devil's advocate in his conversations with Mr. Dean and Mr. Haldeman when they got all through, the analysis of the various alternatives, the President said, we will not do it, it's wrong and the decision was firm and unequivocal, there would be no payoff and there would be no clemency.

Q -

A - May I answer that right now. I'm sure you know, Mr. Nessen, that Mr. John Dean participated in the preparation of the perjured testimony by Jeb Magruder and by Mr. Porter?? And John Dean admits that. So, John Dean, having participated in the perjury, the preparation of the perjured testimony, I don't think comes to this court with very clean hands.

Q -

A - As you will recall from the subsequent tapes, the President did have meetings with Mr. Kleindienst and Mr. Petersen, the head of the criminal division of the Department of Justice. I think it was within 24 or 48 hours as I recall of March 22 and at that time, they discussed what ought to be done. And as I understand it, as I recall it, Mr. Petersen, because of Mr. Kleindienst's desire to stay out of it because there was some indication he might be involved, and because Mr. Petersen, a Democrat, a career employee of the Department of Justice, was given the responsibility. And Mr. Petersen for the next 3 1/2 weeks as I recall, then had total jurisdiction of the Department of Justice. And if anything, Mr. Petersen, according to the tapes, was slowing down the President pushing to get some action. And, I'm not criticizing Mr. Petersen because he may have had some good reasons as the head of the Department of Justice investigating it. But if there was any slowdown between March 21 and the middle of April, it was because Mr. Petersen and others in the Department of Justice were urging caution as they negotiated with Mr. Dean who later admitted a felony and others. So, I don't think in all honesty really that the President can be criticized. He turned it over to the Department of Justice and Mr. Kleindienst stepped aside and Mr. Petersen took the responsibility. And I am glad he did because he's a good law enforcement man and a Democrat so he could be objective.

Q - How can the people be assured that the transcripts of the tapes were not tampered with other than the word of the President?

A - That's a very good question. But let me take it as I see it. Out of the 40 some tapes that have been requested by the Committee, 19 have already been delivered. The actual tapes. So the Committee could hire experts or technicians and have their own analysis as to whether the tapes that have been delivered, including the March 21 tape, and if they haven't been they I should think that should be some evidence of the validity of the White House cooperation. Now in the cases of the other tapes, I think the best way to insure that there's no monkey business with any of the tapes is for the Committee to ask the White House, the President, can we hire, can we jointly hire some technicians and let them go into it. And I understand that with the employment of highly specialized, objective, nonprejudicial technicians that the White House will cooperate.

(Interruption by newsman)

If they want to, if they have any serious doubts. I know that the White House within reasonable limits would have no objection to that kind of technical, objective, nonprejudicial analysis by the technicians.

Q -

A - The problem there is that you have tapes that cover a good many hours. In between discussions that the President had with people who had a connection with or involvement or knowledge about Watergate, you have totally nonrelated discussions. He might have had one with Secretary of State Kissinger. One with Secretary of Defense Laird. Now those are totally nonrelated to Watergate or ramification of it. As I understand it, they have deleted those parts of those tapes and I think that's a fair and proper deletion because the House Committee on the Judiciary doesn't have any jurisdiction in those areas.

Q -

A - That way the President has said to the Democratic Chairman of the Committee and to the Republican ranking member, you come down and you can listen to them. You can verify absolutely everything. We'll give it to you. And you let the two members, the Chairman and the ranking Republican sit there, listen, listen as they read the transcripts. Perfect verification.

Q -

A - How would I have handled it? You mean over and above the 19 that were given? Well, I think the proposition the President has made to the Committee, the delivery of not only the additional transcripts of the tapes beyond the 19 but some additional material which the Committee didn't ask for, I think the President in this respect in as much he's permitted this verification by the Chairman, the Democratic Chairman, and the ranking Republican. Furthermore, he has agreed to be interrogated. He's agreed to take under oath interrogatories. The only difference I would have with the President, and it's significant to me, is that I think the President should have done this some months ago. I wish he had.

Q -

A - I happen to think that the President's proposal to the Democratic Chairman and to the ranking Republican Member of the Committee, two members of Congress who have sworn to uphold the Constitution is a better proposition than the one I made. I wouldn't have any objection to having Mr. Doar and Mr. St. Clair join, but I would specifically exclude Mr. Jenner because I don't like the attitude that he expressed when he was first appointed. He made some comments that in my opinion were totally unwise for a man employed in that situation. I think Mr. Doar and Mr. St. Clair, if they should be added are alright, but I would specifically exclude Mr. Jenner.

Q - What are the comments Mr. Jenner made?

A - Well, he made some comments, I have forgotten precisely, shortly after he was picked by the Republicans, I think mistakenly. He made some comments about impeachment, what impeachment was and so forth and so on and in addition, he, as I understand it, donated \$1,000 to Senator Adlai Stevenson's campaign fund which I don't think was very wise for a person who wanted to be objective in the position in which he was placed. Doar and St. Clair, fine, but I think the better procedure and I think the President came up with it, was to have Rodino and Hutchinson do it. They came up with a better solution than I suggested.

Q -

A - Well, I think they are the same questions that the President acknowledged on Monday night when he said on the March 21 date there could be some ambiguity. Those ambiguities are that the President acting in the capacity of a devil's advocate in talking with Dean and Haldeman raised certain things that in and of themselves, if you don't take the full text, look bad or sound bad. But when you come to the final answer in the last minutes of the several hour conversation, the President says it's wrong, either clemency or payments, and he says we will have no part of it.

Q -

A - But the President if you will take the last statement was very categorical and very specific that nothing, the million dollars or the 120 thousand or the 70 thousand, which I understood was paid, he would agree to none of it. And that is very clear and very specific.

Q -

A - Well, I don't know about Mr. Dean, an admitted felon and person who wasn't believed in the Stans-Mitchell trial. I don't know what he did, but his record isn't very exemplary I might add.

Q - I was wondering, how does a House Member prepare himself to become President of the United States in case something happens to the President?

A - How does a House Member? (A former House member). Well, you don't go about it in any such specific preparation. You just do the job that you're supposed to do. Whatever committee you're on whatever floor participation, whatever other activities you have, you hope that it gives you some foundation for some broader and wider responsibility.

Q - Has it changed your views and comments about Watergate?

A - I haven't changed my views on Watergate. Not at all. I'm interested in the evidence. Not in any speculation or innuendos. I'm interested in what the evidence shows. Now it might have a broader impact on my actual practical application of philosophy, but not on Watergate because the truth is sufficient.

Q -

A - Well, of course either the tapes or the transcripts are admissible in the impeachment proceedings in the House Committee. Are you indicating the question whether they are admissible or inadmissible in a criminal trial involving other people? Is that the question? I'm not sure. (Yes, sir). Yes, under criminal procedure in most states electronic recordings are admissible. (Transcripts?) I think it depends. One state or another has somewhat different rules, but the general rule is that the transcripts are acceptable and if anybody challenges them then there has to be a means of verification. And in this case, the President has complied with that. He has said verification can be made available by Mr. Rodino and Mr. Hutchinson actually listening to them.

Q -

A - Well, in that particular case if you're quoting from the March 21 transcript and I assume you are, when the President concluded he said we will not do it. It's the worth of both words. And within 24 to 48 hours he had a meeting with Mr. Kleindienst, the Attorney General. He had a meeting with Mr. Petersen, the head of the criminal division of the Department of Justice, and this information made available to them. Now I think under those circumstances, the President acted with proper haste and made the proper decision that the matter thereafter ought to proceed in two ways. Through the Department of Justice, and he at that time, as I recall, instructed Mr. John Dean to go up to Camp David and he told John to write a full report, to spend the week-end up there. And, Mr. Dean, as I recollect, went up there. But he didn't come back with any full report because he knew he was so implicated himself and when the President found that Mr. Dean did not carry out his instructions and did not write this report, then the President in effect pushed him aside and turned the job over to another staff member in the White House.

Q - Mr. Vice President,

A - I think within reason he does. Whether or not the information that Mr. Jaworski has requested in the hearing that is coming up, I think tomorrow, that's a matter for the courts to decide. And whatever the courts decide, I think is probably the right decision. I'm not going to prejudge the Court.