

Date: 1972-08-01

Time: 10:33-11:50

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, H. R. "Bob" Haldeman

Location: Oval Office

Tape: 758-011

SCROLLER TITLE: "If It Blows, It Blows"

SCENE SETTER: Riding high in the 1972 pre-election polls, President Nixon paused to assess the state of the Watergate cover-up. Telling White House chief of staff H. R. "Bob" Haldeman he was "not that worried about it," Nixon still recognized the need to reward the Watergate burglars with hush money. Those men "took a hell of a risk and they have to be paid. That's all there is to that," Nixon said.

H. R. "Bob" Haldeman: It's too early to say, but it would appear that—and given a very difficult situation and no cooperation from [Department of] Justice—

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —either FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] or [Richard G. "Dick"] Kleindienst—

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —that our guys have done a—and these two lawyers that the committees hired, have done a superb job in really keeping this thing—

President Nixon: Cool up to this point [*unclear*]—

Haldeman: [*Unclear.*]

President Nixon: Let's be—let's just be fatalistic about the goddamn thing.

Haldeman: If it blows, it blows.

President Nixon: Yeah, if it blows, it blows. And so what?

Haldeman: And we'll ride it out.

President Nixon: We didn't have to kick [Spiro T. "Ted"] Agnew off the ticket, did we? So what is this?

Haldeman: Exactly. We'll ride it out.

President Nixon: So what is this? I'm not that worried about it, to be perfectly candid with you.

Haldeman: Well, it's worth a lot of work to try and keep it from blowing.

President Nixon: Oh, Christ, yes. I still don't like the idea.

Haldeman: But if it blows, we'll survive. It isn't something—

President Nixon: After all, [John N.] Mitchell's gone. And as we've all pointed out, nobody at a higher level was involved, the White House not being involved, and all that stuff. The Cuban crap in there. The Cubans are going to plead not guilty, too? Or are they going to—

Haldeman: I don't know. But everybody's satisfied. They're all out of jail. They've all been taken care of. They've now all . . .

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: They've done a lot of discreet checking to be sure there's no discontent in the ranks. And there isn't any.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: They're all . . .

President Nixon: All out on bail. [*Pause.*]

Haldeman: [E. Howard] Hunt's happy.

President Nixon: At considerable cost, I guess?

Haldeman: Yes.

President Nixon: It's worth it.

Haldeman: It's very expensive. It's a costly—

President Nixon: That's what the money's for.

Haldeman: —exercise. But that's better spent than [*unclear*].

President Nixon: Well, they took a hell of a risk, and they have to be paid. That's all there is to that.

Haldeman: Yep.

President Nixon: They have to be paid. Although, I must say that—and I know I'm kind of second-guessing—[*slightly chuckling*] but whoever made the decision—

Haldeman: Was pretty damn stupid.

President Nixon: —was about as stupid a thing as I ever heard. I mean, that [*unclear*].

Haldeman: But whoever did has suffered for his sins.

President Nixon: I know. Oh, no, don't—

Haldeman: Bloodied.

President Nixon: Never blame him. The poor son of a bitch—what the hell—got such a stupid goddamn idea. He must have got it from Hunt. Sounds like him, doesn't it? Hunt—[G. Gordon] Liddy, I mean. I can't think of anybody in our—in that organization. [Jeb S.] Magruder wouldn't think up such a damn thing. He isn't—

Haldeman: I can't conceive that he would.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: I think it's Liddy. Liddy apparently is a guy that just, you know—

President Nixon: Hates them.

Haldeman: Well, lives on this kind of stuff.

President Nixon: Mm-hmm.

Haldeman: He loves . . .

President Nixon: Now, he's resigned?

Haldeman: Long time—No, he was fired.

President Nixon: Fired, for not cooperating?

Haldeman: He was fired for not cooperating with the FBI. Long time ago, right at his, right at his first—

President Nixon: He will be—he will be—That's already been printed, hasn't it? [*Haldeman acknowledges.*] And Hunt, it's been printed that he's refused to talk with anybody. All right.

Haldeman: I don't know where Hunt stands.

President Nixon: [*Unclear*] not here. [*Pause.*]

You know, they might just be so silly they're thinking of [*unclear*] on there, putting him on this to make this case [*unclear*] about the Watergate, and so forth.

Haldeman: [*Unclear*] that.

President Nixon: [*Unclear*] there's not that much—I don't know of—I never discount the kind of crap that the press will put to us on a thing like this. But, Bob, it does not—we've—we have stayed completely away from it. I've stayed completely away from it. And we will—[Clark M.] MacGregor, of course, will take a, as he should, a holier-than-thou attitude. I will.

Haldeman: [*Unclear.*]

President Nixon: Right?

Haldeman: Yeah. And we've kept [Charles W. "Chuck"] Colson clear of it, which is—

President Nixon: Yeah. [*Unclear*] knowing everybody is difficult. [*Haldeman acknowledges.*] [*Pause.*]

Haldeman: And if we can hold up this civil thing, then they won't get—see, they—they've served Ed Wilson.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: On a discovery deal.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: But they'll—the motion will be made on a civil suit to suspend all activity on that, pending the outcome of the criminal action.

President Nixon: We are still trying, are we, to—doing our best to be sure that the various groups are . . .

[*Unclear*] political hanky-panky are kept under indictment, or whatever it is, or charged, until after the election, on the other side. Know what I mean? That veterans group in, down there in Florida [*unclear*]. You remember?

Haldeman: Yeah.

President Nixon: [*speaking over Haldeman*] [*unclear.*] In the end, you've got to have the veterans. You've got to pardon everybody.

Haldeman: Yeah. [*Pause.*] Well, what we're trying to do is get some more. Some other actions on the other side that—so you got some—

President Nixon: It's hard to find them. Well, not necessarily.

Haldeman: Well, I think we'll find some more.

President Nixon: They're going to be doing something.

Haldeman: They'll be doing something.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: And maybe catch some on some bad raps.

President Nixon: You mean, like what?

Haldeman: Where they appear to be doing something. We may get some pretty good chances at the Republican [National] Convention.

President Nixon: Oh, you mean, of course, riots and that sort of thing? Yeah. And violence.

Haldeman: Yeah. Then we'll hang onto that for a while and then let them all go.

End of excerpt.

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