

Date: 1971-07-01

Time: 08:45-09:52

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

Location: Oval Office

Tape: 534-002

SCROLLER TITLE: "I Really Need a Son of a Bitch"

SCENE SETTER: Convinced that the leak of the Pentagon Papers foretold a vast conspiracy to leak his own secrets, President Nixon decided to mount a counterconspiracy. He would target his perceived enemies through "a program for leaking out information, for destroying these people in the papers." Nixon's Special Investigations Unit, also known as the Plumbers, would go on to conduct a series of illegal operations, including the break-in at the Watergate complex.

President Nixon: It may be here that we could use [Melvin R. "Mel"] Laird. I'll tell you why: Laird has the biggest spy apparatus of anybody, you understand. That's bigger than the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] on things like this. The FBI won't get into this sort of thing. They don't know how to handle it, Bob. They do not handle it.

Now, the main thing is whether the Laird group will get into it. Here's what I have in mind, and I've got to get [Tom Charles] Huston or somebody fast, but either Huston or somebody like Huston fast. That's why the—on the [Richard V.] Dick Allen thing. I think you've got to take Dick Allen on the mountaintop to see if he wants to handle this. Who said that he didn't? You didn't think he was the right guy, or somebody didn't. John [D. Ehrlichman] didn't, I think, or somebody, because he's too [unclear]—

H. R. "Bob" Haldeman: Well, Dick doesn't think he is.

President Nixon: Dick Allen doesn't? OK.

Haldeman: He'll come—on the short term, though, we can get Allen in right now and get him—

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —get him pulling some people together who can do it.

President Nixon: He doesn't need really to come to [Henry E.] Petersen right away, does he? Does Petersen need him now [unclear]?

Haldeman: Yeah, but, you know, we can use Allen.

President Nixon: Well, [unclear]—this is the way [unclear]: I have a project that I want somebody to take this just like I took the [Alger] Hiss case, and the [Elizabeth T.] Bentley case, and the rest. And I'll tell you what this takes, this takes 18 hours a day. It takes devotion and dedication and loyalty and devilishness such as you've never seen, Bob. I've never worked as hard in my life, and I'll never work as hard again, because I don't have the energy. But this is a hell of a great opportunity, because here's what it is: I'm going to track down every goddamn leak there is and, you see—and here's where John will recoil. I don't—probably we—we'll have to tell him. You probably don't know what I meant when I said yesterday that we won the Hiss case in the papers. We did. I had to leak stuff all over the place.

Haldeman: Mm-hmm.

President Nixon: Because the Justice Department would not have prosecuted. [J. Edgar] Hoover didn't even cooperate until I leaked it out. It was won in the papers. John [N.] Mitchell doesn't understand that sort of thing. He's a good lawyer. It's abhorrent to him. John Ehrlichman will have difficulty. But what I mean is we have to develop now a program, a program for leaking out information, for destroying these people in the papers. That's one side of it—how to get after the conspiracy.

The other side of it is the declassification . . . declassification. And then leaking to or giving out to our friends the stories that they would like to have, such as the Cuban confrontation. Get what I mean? Let's have a little fun. There's a—Let me tell you why the declassification of previous years helps us. [Unclear.] It takes the eyes off of Vietnam. It gets them thinking about the past rather than our present problems. You get the point?

Haldeman: Yeah. Absolutely.

President Nixon: And, as a matter of fact, these papers in a sense, well, in a sense—well, they were about the Pentagon war papers, and so forth. It was too confusing to be *the* war, in my opinion. What do you think?

Haldeman: It was another day. It was other administrations, other casts of characters.

President Nixon: Yeah. [Unclear] I think it was, sure, it's about the war, and so forth, [unclear], but it is not about what we're doing in the war at this time. [Haldeman acknowledges.]

It's not about what we're doing. Now, you see why we need—I need somebody—I need really rather than a worker—just to give you the personality type—oh, like [John C.] Whitaker, who'll work his butt off and do it honorably. I need a—I really need a son of a bitch like Huston who will work his butt off and do it dishonorably. You see what I mean? Who will know what he's doing and will not—I want to know, too. And I'll direct him myself. I'll pitch it. I know how to play this game.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: "Richard M. Nixon and H. R. 'Bob' Haldeman on 1 July 1971," Conversation 534-002, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.