

DRAFT

Conversation No. 450-1

Date: February 16, 1971

Time: Unknown between 7:56 am and 8:58 am

Location: Oval Office

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, Alexander P. Butterfield

In one of the very first Nixon Tapes, presidential aide Alexander Butterfield briefed the president on the recently installed voice-activated taping system tied to the presidential locator system. Butterfield told the president: “You’re wearing the locator right now and you’re in the office,” and that the system operated by “voice activation, so you don’t have to turn it on and off.”

Nixon inquired if it would be possible to expand the system, which at the time only operated in the Oval Office, and stressed the reason behind his decision to tape: “You see, the purpose of this is to have the whole thing on the file for professional reasons.”

Butterfield acknowledged that it was possible to expand the system, and for record-keeping purposes, “It could be used to make notes.” Furthermore, Butterfield told the president that he had gone over the potential use of the tapes for note taking with Chief of Staff H.R. “Bob” Haldeman, and noted that the system was an office secret because, “There are only five people who know about it, outside of Haldeman, then you and me. Only five people in our office should be concerned with this...”

[Previous unrelated conversation omitted]

Nixon: How does it work in here?

Butterfield: Well, they’re *[the Secret Service]* sorting it out now.

Nixon: What activates it?

Butterfield: When you have the locator on, the machine starts. *[unclear]* You might not be surprised by this *[unclear]*, locator on. It tells us where you are, throughout the executive office. And it’s automatically working, so it’s working now.

[Noise; possibly an unclear exchange]

Nixon: The system stays off, no? It’s working?

Butterfield: You’re wearing the locator right now and you’re in the office *[unclear]*. It doesn’t have an on-and-off switch. It depends on voice activation—

Nixon: Right.

Butterfield: —so you don’t have to turn it on and off.

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Nixon: Oh, this is good. Is there any chance to get two? You see, the purpose of this is just to have the whole thing on the file...

Butterfield: Yes, sir.

Nixon: ...for professional reasons.

Butterfield: Right, but if it were voice activated in the Cabinet Room, because there's so much going on there all the time—

Nixon: Yeah.

Butterfield: [*unclear*] it'd be using up stuff so fast [*unclear*], so—

Nixon: Yeah.

Butterfield: I mean you can come in but [*unclear*] chance that you turn it off and you've got no record. I can tell when it's on and off, but only from my office. There's no way of telling you in the Cabinet room. When it is going on, you just have to remember we selectively [*unclear; transcribe it?*].

Nixon: All right.

Butterfield: It could be used to make notes [*unclear*]. I was going over this [*unclear*] this morning with Bob [*Haldeman*].

Nixon: Uh-huh.

Butterfield: And we're going to monitor it. [*unclear; noise*] He called the attention to this.

Nixon: How does that work, Alex? Does it work with you here?

Butterfield: Uh, no. I'm going to monitor this [*unclear*].

Nixon: I don't want it monitored, you see?

Butterfield: I'm just—

Nixon: What happens when a record is made—a tape?

Butterfield: A tape is made, yes, sir.

Nixon: And then it's, well...

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Butterfield: There are only five people that know about it, outside of Haldeman, Ziegler, you and me. Only five people in our office Secret Service [*staff*]*—None of Taylor's people.*¹

Nixon: No. No.

Butterfield: None of Taylor's people. They're all cryptanalysts.

Nixon: Yeah, and they're just used for, uh...

Butterfield: They only change the spools. They cannot monitor it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Butterfield: It's a lot easier than planning to tape something.

Nixon: Put [*unclear*] and Haldeman on this.

Butterfield: Yes, sir.

Nixon: He has [*unclear*] to everybody.

Butterfield: [*unclear*] he did around before in the military. He put it in and has taken care of it when we needed him to. [*unclear*] the Secret Service [*unclear*]

[The rest of the conversation is unclear and is cut off by a G-tone]

¹ It is likely that Butterfield and Nixon were referring to Robert H. Taylor, the Secret Service special agent in charge of the White House details for Presidents Johnson and Nixon. See: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9803E2DF1239F937A25750C0A967948260>