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**Conversation No. 452-17**

**Date: February 19, 1971**

**Time: 1:39 pm - unknown before 2:25 pm**

**Location: Oval Office**

**Participants: Richard M. Nixon, H. R. “Bob” Haldeman**

*In one of the first taped conversations, Nixon and his Chief of Staff discussed the potential use of the surreptitious taping system, in this case a minor dispute within the administration over the “firing” of Undersecretary of the Interior, Fred Russell.<sup>1</sup>*

*In this conversation, Nixon was clearly aware of the taping system and suggested using the tapes to Haldeman, “since you’ve got the recording,” regarding instructions on how to treat Russell. Haldeman was clearly enthusiastic (“Let’s use the recording.”) but suggested the use of tapes “on the basis of your notes...we can go back and use the recordings...” Nixon again stressed his desire to avoid transcription from the tapes: “I don’t want you to transcribe those unless it’s important. See?”*

*[Previous unrelated conversation omitted]*

**Nixon:** Bob, you know the problem. I—It’s awfully hard, but I just told Henry this. He’s [Kissinger’s] gullible as hell. He really is.

**Haldeman:** Yeah. He’s—He’s...

**Nixon:** Learning.

**Haldeman:** He’s bright enough though that he’s, you know, he’s worried.

**Nixon:** Well, I need to worry about him. The problem is really that it’s hard to find a man, Bob, is, you know, in the foreign policy area who is—God, how the hell we run the government I don’t know, but we do find enough. We do eventually, but if they can find a guy that’s on our side that is bright, bright enough.

**Haldeman:** We’ve found a lot.

**Nixon:** They’re not so—They’re not all unhappy left-wingers to be bright. Also, you can’t then operate our people. I told [Press Secretary Ronald] Ziegler to cover that whole thing with Fred Russell. Goddamn that burned my ass!

**Haldeman:** Yeah.

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<sup>1</sup> See Oval Office Conversation 452-3 in which Nixon and Haldeman discuss a news story that Fred J. Russell was dismissed from his post in the Interior Department and that presidential aide John Ehrlichman actually fired Russell. Nixon argued that this was not fair treatment of Russell, who later became the U.S. Ambassador to Denmark. According to a *Washington Post* article, “Mr. Nixon formally acknowledged yesterday the resignation of J. Fred Russell as Under Secretary of the Interior.” See: “Nixon, Aides Meet on Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Post* (Feb 28, 1971) pg. 2.

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**Nixon:** [*You don't*] embarrass the man after two years. I don't care if he was a hard ass, a screwball, or a nut, you don't say he was fired. You know what that does to a man, Bob?

**Haldeman:** Ron's statement, incidentally, didn't really say he was fired. It—it, you know, mulled it around the other day.

**Nixon:** [*unclear*] I told Alex [*Butterfield*] he was fired. That's what we wanted to get out.

**Haldeman:** He was fired because...

**Nixon:** See, that's a problem I believe. Oh well, it will turn out fine except [*unclear*] talked to him. You are open to our—[*tape noise*]. Would it not be possible to just do these without the [*unclear*]. We talked about doing it before.

**Haldeman:** Sure.

**Nixon:** Since you've got the recording—Oh, wait a minute.

**Haldeman:** Let's use the recording.

**Nixon:** That's right.

**Haldeman:** But we can—we can do it on the basis of your notes. I mean we can put the thing out afterwards.

**Nixon:** If I deal it or something?

**Haldeman:** No, see, I can go back. We can go back and we can use the recordings, but we can't—

**Nixon:** I don't want you to transcribe those unless it's important. See?

**Haldeman:** We can just run it back and take notes off them.

**Nixon:** Oh, hell, maybe we'll have somebody to—It's just a little bit awkward for them both to be standing, you know, without anything to do.

**Haldeman:** It's probably more awkward for you than it is for anybody else.

**Nixon:** Maybe it is. Well, then, why don't you do it? Just have him come in, you know, or help to be part of the [*unclear*]. But what I'm dealing with really is that I have an advantage to be able to make notes, but just we'll let them work. But having them come in each time and then go out, then they don't have the feeling notes work and then go out and they don't have the feeling that it's [*unclear*]. It will be less awkward for me. I feel

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awkward because I think it's awkward for the [unclear] knowing me to remember what the hell he's saying there.

*[Omitted here is unrelated conversation]*