

DRAFT

Conversation No. 456-5

Date: February 23, 1971

Time: 10:05 am - 11:30 am

Location: Oval Office

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

In one of only a handful of taped conversations that mention the White House taping system, President Nixon contemplates using the taped conversations to inform press briefings by Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler and as a means of record keeping for meetings.

Nixon forgetfully asked his Chief of Staff H.R. “Bob” Haldeman if presidential aide Alexander Butterfield knew of the taping system. Haldeman replied, “Yes, sir. He put it in.”

In terms of utilizing the tapes for record keeping, Nixon explicitly stated: “I don’t want anything transcribed unless I say so.” Haldeman concurred and hinted at keeping the system secret: “That’s right. No, not even transcribe it. Tell [Butterfield] to go back and listen to it and just make notes off of it...As if he had been sitting here making notes.”

This discussion was likely provoked by Nixon’s desire to disband the Appalachia Regional Commission and reduce regional social spending programs in early 1971. Nixon mentioned John Waters and Jack Williams, two players in the policy struggle, as the rationale behind using the tapes to review potentially contentious meetings, or ones that did not get the right press “play” in the administration’s estimation.

[Previous unrelated conversation omitted]

Nixon: I looked at a *Newsweek* and [unclear] work on this listening thing. It just doesn’t work to have somebody be in here every minute [unclear] some guy went to school with or some damn thing, so I’ve worked it out with Alex. It’s all done though. He should check the thing [taping system] every day to see if he and Zeigler could pick out one or two items that they think may have some covering or, you know, those that the writer could then lip. See? And that’s that. But if I—Like today I’ve seen John Waters¹ with Appalachia—I don’t want anybody to know when I’ve see John Waters with Appalachia—I’ve seen Jack Williams² on other areas. I don’t want anybody to know when I see them. There ain’t nothing to report.

Haldeman: Understood. Now there’s another—You—

Nixon: We have the substance—

Haldeman: You’re as aware as anybody, you know, when there is somebody—

Nixon: I haven’t seen any cover on it—

¹ John B. Waters, Jr. served as the Federal Co-Chairman of the Appalachian Regional Commission from 1968-1971. See: <http://www.lrwlaw.com/jbw2.htm> and also “Appalachia Nomination,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*: March 21, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post pg. C6.

² John “Jack” Richard Williams was the conservative Republican governor of Arizona from 1967-1975.

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Haldeman: If there is, tell Alex. Just say, “In that meeting—

Nixon: Well, does he know?

Haldeman: Yes, sir. He put it in.

Nixon: All right.

Haldeman: Just tell Alex—

Nixon: And say, “You might just transcribe”—I don’t want anything transcribed unless I say so.

Haldeman: That’s right. No, not even transcribe it. Tell him to go back and listen to it and just make notes off of it.

Nixon: Good. All right.

Haldeman: As if he had been sitting here making notes.

Nixon: All right. That’s fine.

Haldeman: But he must do it [*himself*]. He understands that.

Nixon: I think so.

Haldeman: Pull up that meeting. We’ll pull it up now, so we’ll then never lose anything. Then get him, once a month maybe—

Nixon: Bob, I can tell him initially.

Haldeman: You know. Just tell him afterwards. Get the thing back to that.

Nixon: It isn’t working out comfortably that way. There’s a price.

Haldeman: Yes there is. First, the guy that was doing the, I don’t know, with sports, John Andrews, the sports, you know, the physical fitness—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —bunch, and you had some superb things. And the overall thing was even more so going down that receiving line. And they put some of those out. The one that really got some mileage and is a damn worthwhile thing was that the tennis guy’s new scoring system, or counting system.

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Nixon: [*James H.*] Van Allen³?

Haldeman: Van Allen, yeah. I didn't even know what he was talking about.

Nixon: I only got it because I read the sports page.

Haldeman: But you knew it. You made some crack about it, and then there was a great interview between his wife and you about how it took us nine years to get people to accept this and you had something about how you know what the problem is. [*Chuckles*] It was a great interchange, and it got played.

Nixon: That's different from this, though.

Haldeman: Yeah. Sure.

Nixon: This kind of thing, Bob, with Jim Udall⁴ and the rest, I don't want everybody to get a look at it. Ok?

Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: That's good. Well, I'm glad we have somebody doing it.

[Following unrelated conversation omitted]

³ The Institute for International Sport describes James H. "Jimmy" Van Alen as a tennis star, founder of the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum, and as the creator of the Van Alen Simplified Scoring System, used to break ties and still used in tennis today. See:

http://www.internationalsport.com/sa_hof/hof_rihonorees00.html#vanalen

⁴ It is likely that James Udall was Nixon's friend and gambling companion in the Navy during WWII.