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Conversation No. 33-4

Date: November 4, 1972

Time: 8:40 am - 8:45 am

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, Ronald L. Ziegler

In this pre-election conversation with the president about the stall in the Vietnamese peace negotiations days before, press secretary Ronald Ziegler reports to Nixon: “[Democratic candidate George] McGovern is charging deception, of course, and that [South Vietnamese President Nyugen Van] Thieu is holding the thing up.”

To handle the response, Ziegler counsels: “I think very definitely McGovern should be cracked and cracked hard [...] because, you know, this man went on television [...] and said [...] we were deceiving [...] the American people and the world on an important matter such as peace. And I think this is where the line that you use in your foreign policy speech, the line that can be used so effectively, that we can’t wish for peace. You know it’s something that has to be achieved [...] through patience. Also, we can’t beg for peace [...] And I think the other line that we won’t be stampeded or rushed into an agreement by the [North Vietnamese] propaganda.”

Nixon agreed with Ziegler and added: “You make the point that we have agreed on three fundamental things, but we’ve got to nail them down to be sure that they’re sound [...] With a withdrawal we don’t want a ceasefire unless it’s policed.” Agreeing with Ziegler’s advice, Nixon said that National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger should not engage the McGovern camp on the problems: “Well, anyway, keep Henry cool on that thing.”

[See Also Conversation No. 389-2]

Operator: Mr. Ziegler.

Nixon: Hello?

Ziegler: Yes, sir.

Nixon: What is your feeling this morning of the Kissinger thing? Are you where you can talk?

Ziegler: Yes, sir. I’m in the—

Nixon: Yeah—

Ziegler: —I’m in the office.

Nixon: Fine.

Ziegler: I think it came out just about as we expected and discussed. McGovern is charging deception, of course, and that Thieu is holding the thing up. Your postured that you’re not going

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to be stampeded by the thing. I don't know. I don't know what Henry can add, Mr. President. He was quoted this morning in the *Washington Post*.

Nixon: Henry?

Ziegler: Yes.

Nixon: Good God! I—

Ziegler: No, it was fine. It was perfect.

Nixon: Oh, well. He didn't have a news conference?

Ziegler: No, no.

Nixon: Oh.

Ziegler: He talked to some foreign students and he projected, you know, the feeling of confidence...

Nixon: Right.

Ziegler: ...and so forth, picking up on what you did, so I think that really helps to serve the thing, too. I think—I think very definitely McGovern should be cracked and cracked hard today by Secretary Rogers.

Nixon: Between Rogers and Laird?

Ziegler: Right. Absolutely, because, you know, this man went on television last night and then more—and said we were deceiving, you know, uh—

Nixon: Um- hmmm.

Ziegler: —the American people and the world on an important matter such as peace. And I think this is where the line that you use in your foreign policy speech, the line that can be used so effectively, that we can't wish for peace. You know it's something that has to be achieved—

Nixon: Yeah.

Ziegler: —through patience. Also, we can't beg for peace...

Nixon: Right.

Ziegler: ...as he proposed.

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

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Ziegler: And I think the other line that we won't be stampeded or rushed into an agreement by the propaganda—

Nixon: And also, the point here—

Ziegler: —[unclear] position—

Nixon: And also, you make the point that we have agreed on three fundamental things, but we've got to nail them down to be sure that they're sound.

Ziegler: That's right.

Nixon: That's all I'm saying—

Ziegler: That's right.

Nixon: With a withdrawal we don't want a ceasefire unless it's policed. No, we don't. That's, see, that's what this is all about.

Ziegler: Right.

Nixon: We don't want elections unless they're proper.

Ziegler: I think [clears throat]—All right.

Nixon: Well, anyway, keep Henry cool on that thing. Yeah.

Ziegler: All righty.

Nixon: I don't see that there's any reason for him to go working out and having a big thing. That would be very defensive for him to do it.

Ziegler: I think so, too.

Nixon: Right. Right. Right—

Ziegler: You know I think the posture that you're objecting as you did yesterday, uh, is good...

Nixon: Well, it may be. The only problem is I was looking at least as far as the *Times* and the *Post* they don't give it much of a play in other words.

Ziegler: Well, but that's immaterial because it got excellent play on television.

Nixon: Yeah.

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Ziegler: And it got that—

Nixon: I mean—No, what I meant is the posture on Vietnam. Did it get a play on television, too?

Ziegler: Oh, yes it did.

Nixon: Right. Well—

Ziegler: Sure.

Nixon: —that's the important thing.

Ziegler: And on the wires, and on the radio—

Nixon: Right.

Ziegler: —and all across the country—

Nixon: You know, I was thinking. I don't what [*Robert B.*] Semple must have burr some up his tail. He said there were modest, highly partisan crowds. Did you see that?

Ziegler: Um-hmmm. Yes, I did.

Nixon: Huh. Was he there?

Ziegler: Yeah, well he—Yes, but you have to keep in mind that Bob's a good guy but he's going up there to that new job.

Nixon: Is he?

Ziegler: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: What's the new job?

Ziegler: Assistant to the national editor.

Nixon: Oh, boy. So he's, uh—He's just got to butter up to them, huh?

Ziegler: Well, I—I've...

Nixon: He must feel a little sheepish about such stuff. I'd underline that and then show him the Chicago thing. Would you do that?

Ziegler: Yes, sir. I will.

Nixon: Maybe just needle him just a little.

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Ziegler: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: Generally speaking, the coverage was adequate, though, wasn't it?

Ziegler: Yes. I thought very good.

Nixon: Yeah. Ok. Fine.

Ziegler: Very good.

Nixon: Fine.

Ziegler: Ok, sir.