

DRAFT

Conversation No. 813-20

Date: November 8, 1972

Time: 10:16 - 10:53 a.m.

Location: Oval Office

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

In an Oval Office conversation the morning after Nixon’s landslide reelection, the president and Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman discuss plans for that morning’s upcoming staff and cabinet meetings. The two men discuss how to inform cabinet members of the president’s second term government reorganization plan, which includes the expectation that all cabinet members are expected to resign. Haldeman recommends, “The main thing is to just say ‘You’ve done a great job in this past term. We’re going to look to doing better in the next term, that I know some of you will be leaving, some of you will be moving to different kinds of jobs, and some of you will be staying where you are.’”

The conversation then turns to the election results, and Haldeman notes that media coverage is calling it an historic, landslide election, even though “there’s still a fair amount [of votes] to come in.” Concurring with Haldeman that the Congressional results were disappointing, Nixon tries to rationalize the results. As part of damage control, the president suggests, “Start pissing on the Party before the Party... starts pissing on us.”

Press Secretary Ron Zeigler noted to the president he planned to announce at his briefing later that day of the planned government reorganization and that Al Haig was being sent to Saigon to continue negotiations to end American involvement in southeast Asia.

[Approximately 1 ½ minutes of unrelated conversation omitted]

Nixon: Christ, what this has done—What are you—What do you want me to say to the staff? Do I say I’d like their resignations?

Haldeman: No, sir.

Nixon: I will just thank them for their work and so forth and so on and make it very brief and then get the hell out—

Haldeman: Absolutely, and say you know I’m covering that...

Nixon: Yeah

Haldeman: ...you know, the outlook for them, the plans for the next few weeks—

Nixon: “I want Bob to talk to you a bit about it.”

Haldeman: And, uh—

Nixon: Try to [unclear]—

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Haldeman: No, I'll have already done it unless you want to come in at the beginning of the meeting and go out.

Nixon: When is it?

Haldeman: That's at 10:45 [*am*].

Nixon: I'll come in at 10:45 [*am*].

Haldeman: Ok. That's better. You open it.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: And then go out.

Nixon: And then you'll take them. Now, and then you'll make that meeting and be in to the Cabinet meeting by 11:00 [*am*]?

Haldeman: Yeah. It's just going to take a couple of minutes. We've got a—We've got—

Nixon: We really need that Cabinet meeting, right?

Haldeman: Well, whatever you want. I don't know whether you want me there or not. I can—

Nixon: Who the hell is going to talk to them about their resignations and so forth?

Haldeman: [*Secretary of State*] Bill [*William P. Rogers*] will talk to them about their resignations and then I was going to go in at that point and cover the wrap-up set. Now, Bill thought I ought to be there. I thought maybe I ought to not be there, that you ought to have a chance. I kind of think I should not be there when you're in.

Nixon: Yeah, that's fine—

Haldeman: You should talk to them alone and then let me go in when you come out.

Nixon: You [*unclear; come afterwards*]. Ok. All right. Fine.

Haldeman: Unless—

Nixon: But don't do—but nobody else.

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: I wouldn't take Ehrlichman in, for example—

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Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: —and, well, not Butterfield or any of those [*unclear*], you see—

Haldeman: Understood.

Nixon: So that they all don't feel that we're trying to [*run?*] them for you to come in. Now, what would you suggest I say to the staff? Shall I say that I know you want a discussion of future plans, or...

Haldeman: Just say that—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —that I will be discussing the arrangements for the short term, but we do plan to be making some changes and, uh—

Nixon: We have to—

Haldeman: —and that's what we're going to spend this time studying, that I'll go over the things—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —that need to be done now in the interim period and that, we'll—The main thing is to just say, "You've done a great job"—

Nixon: Right. Right.

Haldeman: —“in this past term. We're going to look to”—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —“to doing better in the next term, that I know some of you”—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —“will be leaving, some of you will be moving to different kinds of jobs, and some of you will be”—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —“staying where you are.”

Nixon: Yeah.

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Haldeman: “Whatever it is you’re doing it’s been great—

Nixon: “As long as you’re appreciated we want to work it out in a way that will be in the best interests of everybody concerned.”

Haldeman: These are the senior people—

Nixon: Now, what are they going to do?—

Haldeman: These are the senior staff heads, and you should tell them to say the same thing. They’ll each be having a meeting with their own units later today. You should tell them to say the same thing to them.

Nixon: Then—then, you know, what about negotiation? I won’t tell them, though, that they’re all to submit their resignations.

Haldeman: Nope.

Nixon: You can tell them that.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Fine. Now with Rogers what do I say? I want to thank the Cabinet for its work in the campaign?

Haldeman: And essentially the same kind of thing again, that—

Nixon: “We know”—

Haldeman: “Some of you have plans for leaving and some of you’ll be moving to different things. We are going to be working on some”—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —“very sweeping plans”—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —“for changes”—

Nixon: Right. And, “I want to talk to you individually.”

Haldeman: But not now.

Nixon: “But after I’ve had a chance to get a little rest.”

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Haldeman: “And give some thought to some of the things you probably want to work out.” And I know—You see, you got—

Nixon: “I know that you’ll want to think about it.”

Haldeman: You’ve got—like Volpe right wants to come in and see you before—right after the Cabinet meeting. So you’ve got to kind of parlay it and I’ll cover it specifically. You can just say, “I want to talk to each of you.”

Nixon: Yeah, “I’m going to talk to each of you individually about your plans”

Haldeman: “But we expect to”—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —“first thing”—

Nixon: Incidentally, I think, you know, on Cabinet people the idea that you have given them a form [*for resigning*]

Haldeman: No, we’re not.

Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: We’re not. We’re not.

Nixon: That should not be done. You can do that with staff people...

Haldeman: That’s right.

Nixon: ...but I don’t think you can do it to Cabinet people.

Haldeman: We are not doing it.

Nixon: How is it going to be done with Cabinet people?

Haldeman: Cabinet people will just be asked to submit their resignations, and—

Nixon: Um-hmm. What are we going to do with...regard to...I guess, perhaps, one of the toughest things we’re considering is what the hell we do with Morton particularly. If [*the big lovely bear?*] wants to stay, he’s totally incompetent but a great public relations figure. Sometimes—

Haldeman: Well—

Nixon: —we need somebody like that.

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Haldeman: Well, I was just going to stay if you get him—

Nixon: If he'll let you put an undersecretary in.

Haldeman: That's it. Anybody who stays there's got to be a very tough discussion with, first, about the terms under which he stays, which have to be radically different from the terms under which he came.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Haldeman: If he buys that and wants to stay that's fine.

Nixon: Oh, oh. Oh, no. If I can get him to come back to it, I can't do that with [Reeves?].

Haldeman: No. Well, he shouldn't stay.

Nixon: I don't agree when he's there.

Haldeman: I'm talking about the ones that would stay. I don't think [John A.] Volpe should stay.

Nixon: No.

Haldeman: I don't think [George W.] Romney should stay.

Nixon: Romney isn't going to stay. Volpe shouldn't stay.

Haldeman: I don't think that [James D.] Hodgson should stay.

Nixon: Hodgson, I'm going to put a labor man in.

Haldeman: [Peter G.] Peterson should not stay.

Nixon: Peterson should not stay.

Haldeman: Um, Rogers and Laird are separate, special problems.

Nixon: They do not stay—

Haldeman: Kleindienst we've sort of agreed he should stay but it's got to be done under—they're very tough men. We've got to—That [Justice] Department's got to be changed.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: Because we cannot go back and bring [Robert T.] Mardian in as Deputy Attorney General.

Nixon: No, no, no.

Haldeman: That's got to be picked up here.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: And above—

Nixon: You see, in view of the fact that we don't have the Congress, the executive's got to be running better than it was three weeks ago—

Haldeman: That's right.

Nixon: —and we're going to have that Congress run over to talk about it.

Haldeman: Which is another point you might make that we've got to look at our terms of our structure for the second term on the basis of not having the Congress.

Nixon: Well, that's creating a negative note—

Haldeman: Ok. Ok, well...

Nixon: That's not the point I want—

Haldeman: The way that's playing has come out, I think, quite well.

Nixon: I know the [unclear]—

Haldeman: [unclear] the scenario as negatively as they made that look [unclear]—

Nixon: I would note that there are three things that they are playing negatively, which are inevitable. One, that we didn't help the Congress enough. Incidentally, at one point I was talking to [Harry S.] Dent this morning because we were trying to get some—and I hope that you will rectify this immediately, I told him about it, I said “Harry, do you realize how many telephone calls [I made to Congressional candidates]...”, and he said “Yeah, I thought you had, [I think it's that material that's just not getting] around a lot.” And get it over to him. I mean, what I meant is, if you can get it, chapter and verse, to Harry, because he's a hell of an advocate. Because he says, “these guys have got nothing to complain about.”

Haldeman: That's right.

Nixon: And so, what I mean is, I know you get them to [Herb] Klein, and that's fine, but you know, Dent is already a politician, but I want the whole list, “he called them”—you're aware of what I mean by “the list”?

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Haldeman: Yes sir.

Nixon: How many television spots, how many radio spots—

Haldeman: Radio spots, how many pictures—

Nixon: How many pictures—

Haldeman: —how many phone calls, you know, publicized phone calls, how many letters—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —of endorsement.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: And then some of the special, very extensive efforts to channel financing, to provide—

Nixon: Well, they say that the president has no coattails, ok, second, which is, that's that. The [Republican] Party is the problem right now. But we're going to be very, very tough with them if they want to play that game. That's the way they're going to play. The second point is that the vote is low. How you handle that I don't know. The third point is the, basically, the Nancy Dickerson syndrome. That is, since NBC and so forth, the idea well, that "Nixon support is very soft", a little of that crap, but—

Haldeman: That's a very small blip but—

Nixon: I know.

Haldeman: —and it's hard to sell.

Nixon: No, on the plus side, I think that most of them are playing the fact that it's [unclear], although we haven't yet got the figures yet to know what the hell it finally ends up to, I'm trying to get on the thing, but they don't seem to be able to do it.

Haldeman: This last Scali figure suggests that there's still a fair amount [of votes] to come in.

[Approximately four minutes of unrelated conversation omitted]

Haldeman: ...It's like the *New York Times* headline and all, it's just "Nixon wins by a landslide", "Overwhelming landslide", "Historic Victory", and all that kind of thing. And that's the impression that people have to have. And there's—

Nixon: What is the—

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Haldeman: They've been trying to erode it.

Nixon: How are they handling the House and Senate thing?

Haldeman: Same, that the Party failed to carry the Congress, and they don't seem to be building that up as a very big thing.

Nixon: This is one thing to do. Start pissing on the Party before the Party—

Haldeman: Yes.

Nixon: —starts pissing on us.

Haldeman: Yes sir.

Nixon: And who's—that's occurred to people—

Haldeman: Yes, and they started that yesterday to a degree.

Nixon: And [*unclear*] and [*Robert H.*] Finch, and the rest are doing that?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: Who else has started doing it? [*Harry S.*] Dent?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: Dent feels very strongly about it. I talked to him, and you know, you haven't really probably talked to Dent as much as you can and should. Because he does—

Haldeman: Oh yeah.

Nixon: —Dent says it's a question of candidates. He says we've got candidates and you've got a lousy Party organization.

Haldeman: That point has come through. In fact, it's comes that—

Nixon: Dent—

Haldeman: —that some of them are a little annoyed with it, I mean.

Nixon: Dent feels that we've, I said, "Harry aren't there two states maybe where a visit could have done it?" Delaware and Colorado. [*unclear*] I know the figures otherwise, and you know, there's no way. Miller's too far behind.

[*Approximately 22 minutes of conversation related to election and candidate details omitted*]