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Conversation No. 33-104

Date: November 19, 1972

Time: 9:14 am - 9:16 am

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, Ronald L. Ziegler

In this conversation, President Nixon and his press secretary, Ronald Ziegler, discuss press leaks about the president's plan to reorganize the executive branch after his landslide reelection.

The conversation takes a lighter side as the men go over Kissinger's disastrous interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. Nixon told Ziegler, "that interview...was the goddamndest thing I ever saw," provoking laughter from the press secretary. Ziegler replied, "If this one doesn't teach him a lesson I don't know what will." Pressing for details, the president inquired, "Was this some girl he met at a party or something?" Ziegler responded, "the Italian ambassador...kept pressing [Kissinger] to set a meeting."

Nixon: Hello?

Operator: Mr. Ziegler.

Ziegler: Yes, sir?

Nixon: I was wondering about a couple of things. You know that, the story on the, uh—apparently it must have been some sort of a background story or something with regard to the reorganization and so forth. Is that something we put out?

Ziegler: No, absolutely not. We haven't backgrounded on reorganization.

Nixon: Well, you know the one I'm referring to?

Ziegler: There was a story that ran in Florida that you might be referring to.

Nixon: No, there's a story in the paper this morning which said an administration aide—it's on the front page of the...You haven't seen it yet?

Ziegler: No, I have not, sir.

Nixon: Yeah. But John Ehrlichman and nobody else has made any statement on it. I want to control this, Ron, because—

Ziegler: Absolutely.

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Nixon: —I don't want this all to leak out like this. [It hits us] when somebody says the president was going to reorganize up to the limit of the law and so forth and so on; a study has been made in the OMB, and...you see what I mean.¹ Of course it's what we're going to do but I—

Ziegler: Right.

Nixon: —I want it properly explained rather than have people think we're going to try to.

Ziegler: Right.

Nixon: You're sure now that Ehrlichman hasn't talked to anybody.

Ziegler: I'm absolutely, 100 percent sure.

Nixon: Hmmm.

Ziegler: I'm positive no one has—

Nixon: There must be somebody down here.

Ziegler: Well, I—

Nixon: Why don't you check the—it's either the [*Washington*] *Star* or the [*Washington*] *Post*—would you do that?

Ziegler: Yep. I'll do it right away.

Nixon: And call me back as to where the hell the source is because we've got to get it controlled. Of course, in that respect somebody really got to give Henry a [*keeper*]. That, that interview with some Italian was the goddamndest thing I ever saw.

Ziegler: [*laughs*]

Nixon: It was sort of—it sort of—Apart from the personal stuff, but the part where he said that he did the China thing alone and all that sort of thing—

Ziegler: If this doesn't teach him a lesson, I don't know what—

Nixon: Huh?

Ziegler: If this one doesn't teach him a lesson I don't what will—

Nixon: She gives the impression that he, that he sort of thinks that he's done everything himself.

¹ OMB = Office of Management and Budget.

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Ziegler: Well he, he stewed about that, worried about that yesterday. It was unbelievable.

Nixon: Yeah.

Ziegler: This will teach him a lesson.

Nixon: What happened? Was this some girl he met at a party or something? Or...?

Ziegler: I don't know. *[laughs]* The Italian ambassador wanted—

Nixon: Yeah?

Ziegler: —kept pressing him to set a meeting—

Nixon: Of course it's an embarrassing thing for him, Ron, because—

Ziegler: Oh, absolutely.

Nixon: —the quotes are—

Ziegler: It's humiliating to him.

Nixon: Huh?

Ziegler: It's humiliating to him.

Nixon: The quotes are terrible.

Ziegler: No one believes it, this stuff, number one. I haven't seen it. I'm sorry—

Nixon: Yeah?

Ziegler: I just woke up, I better get done reading—

Nixon: Yeah.

Ziegler: —the paper and I'll get—

Nixon: Well, let me know.

Ziegler: I'll call you.

Nixon: Fine. Fine. I'm going to Camp David at noon today, so...

Ziegler: Ok, sir.

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Nixon: Going back up with the family. Ok?

Ziegler: All right.

Nixon: Fine.