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Conversation No. 33-106

Date: November 19, 1972

Time: Between 9:16 am - 9:29 am

Location: White House Telephone

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

In a telephone conversation between President Nixon and his Chief of Staff, H. R. “Bob” Haldeman, the president makes clear his concerns about the reorganization of the executive branch and discusses a plan of action to meet with Cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries—even delaying a trip to Florida to “wrap this thing up.”

Although he would retain Secretary of State William Rogers, Nixon stated, “When I announce his retention I’m going to announce a hell of a lot of changes at the same time...Let me explain why that’s necessary in Rogers’ case. You’ve got a hell of a lot of people that think we just, are we just going to reorganize the State Department. Now, Rogers be damned on this.”

Nixon was also concerned with a story in the Washington Star detailing the executive branch reorganization before it had been achieved and sought to plug the leak. He commented, “We’ve been going along for so long this way with these leaks. This time we just can’t play this sort of game...Well, you read the story and you’ll see why I’m a bit concerned about it...There is no excuse for the fact that this is exactly what we’re going to do, you see. It’s a question of when we say it in the right context, you know...so that everybody gets it and it isn’t, you know, leaked out by some jackass who doesn’t know.”

Nixon also wanted to make changes in the White House itself, a shakeup that he intended to affect his closest aides. “It’s like Henry [Kissinger] after Vietnam is settled; [Chuck] Colson, in a sense, after the election is over, he isn’t going to have nearly the interest. He can’t have, you know, the driving force, the interest, and so forth.”

Nixon: Hello?

Haldeman: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Bob, as I understand you’re not going to Camp David until late tonight?

Haldeman: That’s my plan, yeah.

Nixon: Fine. All right. I just wanted to know. I’m going up with Tricia and Julie today.

Haldeman: Oh, good.

Nixon: ...at noon and we’ll—but I have—I’ll do some work up there and get ready for tomorrow. Now, the other thing is that I just wanted to be sure that we have the schedule and I’m inclined to think that I will not go to Florida this weekend and try to wrap this thing up Friday. I’ve got to—I think we’ve just got to it done...

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Haldeman: Well—

Nixon: ...[*with*] these Cabinet people—

Haldeman: There won't be anything you can do—

Nixon: Well, find out who can—

Haldeman: —[*unclear*]—

Nixon: Find out who can be here Friday and Saturday. Will you do that?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: I mean because some of them I noted are coming back around that period of time. And then that way I can get a chance to just finish it all up and—

Haldeman: The ones that are coming back, we've got in now, I think, all on Wednesday. And it'll leave—

Nixon: Well, who's coming back?

Haldeman: —It'll leave only—Let's see here—We've got [*David M.*] Kennedy, [*James D.*] Hodgson, and [*George*] Romney on Wednesday.

Nixon: Hodgson, Romney, fine—

Haldeman: And it'll leave [*John A.*] Volpe who won't be back, I'm told, [*until*] Monday I think it is.

Nixon: Well, the way we'll do it we—there's no way get that ambassador thing worked out so we could, uh, I mean just...

Haldeman: No, Volpe you could do.

Nixon: Wednesday or Friday?

Haldeman: You could probably do Friday.

Nixon: Um-hmmm. Ok.

Haldeman: I—Now that we're still—I've got a confirm. He would be the only one you'll have. You'd then have, uh—Kleindienst you can't do until Monday.

Nixon: Right.

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Haldeman: And that doesn't matter too much anyway.

Nixon: We know what we're going to do there, except I want to—

Haldeman: You've got to get the FBI into motion.

Nixon: Well, I want to get the FBI and I want to get [*Charles A.*] Wright who is—I'm going to put in as the man too succeed—

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: —Kleindienst. I want to get that done. You see? I've been trying to explain to Ehrlichman and others that what I want to do on these when I make the announcement, rather than just like on Rogers which I've already told you about. When I announce his retention I'm going to announce a hell of a lot of changes at the same time.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Let me explain why that's necessary in Rogers' case. You've got a hell of a lot of people that think we just, are we just going to reorganize the State Department. Now, Rogers be damned on this. I'm going to announce Rush and, you know, as many changes as I possibly can at the same time.

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: See what I mean? That'll give the feeling that, well, we're changing something. Don't you agree?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: And, you see, I can do the same with Kleindienst. I can announce changes down below at the same time, and for those who are retained. Those we are taking [*unclear*], except for like a [*Elliot*] Richardson, we have to announce [*William P.*] Clements at the same time because it'll—our hawks will be scared to death if we just announce Richardson for Defense. So, there's—that's what I'm thinking. I've just got to—I've got to get all those people in. I've got to see these individuals myself, those undersecretary-types, and get them nailed down. Well, I'll plan to stay there [*at Camp David*] then. I'll be available on Friday just to take care of—We'll do the undersecretary-types if necessary...

Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: ...and get them done. Find out what you can. I mean, just sort of line up a schedule for me, so we can find out what—

Haldeman: Ok.

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Nixon: —we can do.

Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: If we can't do enough to make it worthwhile then I won't do it, but, uh...

Haldeman: I think maybe we can.

Nixon: ...to move on them on Friday.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Then you see I'll put off go whatever travel I'm going to do until the following week. You know, go over—rather than going Thanksgiving weekend when everybody else goes I could go, if I go. I'm not—I just don't know what I'm going to do, because I've really got to get this work done so that we get—What I'm a little concerned about is that I was just talking—asking Ziegler about it and he says it did not come from Camp David or from him, but I see a big story in the [*Washington*] *Star*. Their lead story is that how the reorganization is going to be accomplished and that we're going to go to the limits of the law and so forth and so on and so on. And I'm really shocked at such a thing because this has got to be done with a very carefully controlled PR program or otherwise you stir up the animals in a way that they'll all write editorials about things that we're not going to do or are going to do. You understand what I mean?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: I don't know where that came from. Do you have any idea?

Haldeman: Nope.

Nixon: It was in the *Star*. I don't know.

Haldeman: I haven't the *Star*'s stories.

Nixon: A big story. I mean it's about—There's an aide, a high administration aide said that. But we haven't told—We—I mean I just want to—I remember you said you and John and so forth were talking about the PR, but you haven't told him to put out any story like that—

Haldeman: No, sir.

Nixon: —about what we're thinking of.

Haldeman: Nope.

Nixon: It couldn't have been [*Roy L.*] Ash, could it?

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Haldeman: Can't—

Nixon: [*Caspar W. "Cap"*] Weinberger?

Haldeman: I'm not sure it wasn't Ash—

Nixon: Weinberger?

Haldeman: Ash just said [*unclear*]—

Nixon: I'd like to find out then if it wasn't one of the people that we really—

Haldeman: Yeah, we'll hit him on it.

Nixon: —depend upon. We've got to be pretty rough, Bob.

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: Right now, or don't you agree?

Haldeman: I sure do.

Nixon: I'm getting—You know it's really, we've been going along for so long this way with these leaks. This time we just can't play this sort of game.

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: Well, you read the story and you'll see why I'm a bit concerned about it. Because it—And it isn't—there is no excuse for the fact that this is exactly what we're going to do, you see. It's a question of when we say it in the right context, you know, so that they—so that everybody gets it and it isn't, you know, leaked out by some jackass who doesn't know.

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: And, uh...

Haldeman: That's right. Because that we've given a lot of thought to—

Nixon: That's a very—There are some [*unclear*] worth—I had assumed we were doing a lot of thinking about it so that we could get it.

Haldeman: About how we put it out—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —that's right.

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Nixon: It's like the same thing that I've got to get control of and I'm going to try to get it to Colson today to get to work on it. We, I had thought that we had a plan on this situation with regard to—I talked to [Patrick J.] Buchanan he thought there was one, he thought it was organized, too, with regard to the—this thing that Connally was concerned about, about the whether or not we had campaigned for people. Well, whether or not we had supported the ticket and so forth, and it's something that apparently has fallen between the stools there. It may not have fallen between the stools; it may be that we tried, but not at a high enough level. Have you had a chance to talk to Colson yet about the—

Haldeman: No.

Nixon: —what he's, what the plans are?

Haldeman: No. I was going to call him today, try him then. He, as I said yesterday, was out somewhere in Virginia and left word he didn't want to be called so I—

Nixon: Yeah?

Haldeman: [] I don't know whether he is today or whether he's—

Nixon: [*clears throat*]

Haldeman: —[*unclear*] today.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, I'll handle it. I'll handle it. You've got—You know, I was thinking that from the standpoint of the—our—the handling of our PR thing and so forth here that I think that one thing that the Rogers thing really helped on, that it does show that we'd really have a very, very thin operation if we just had Ziegler, you know, and Gerry Warren, and so forth there and then left the PR. As you know, Ehrlichman never takes any responsibility for it, not—

Haldeman: He did completely.

Nixon: Huh?

Haldeman: He did completely.

Nixon: Well...

Haldeman: Everything that was said out of Florida was said—

Nixon: No, no, no, no, no. I'm not speaking of Florida.

Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: I was speaking of from now on.

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Haldeman: Well, it was out of Florida was what Rogers—

Nixon: But an attack and counterattack; but an attack and counterattack. No, I know. I meant what Rogers said about the—what Rogers said as related to what Colson said, where Colson said we really needed a capability. I do think—

Haldeman: Oh, yeah—

Nixon: —we do need a capability, Bob, because we can't have a situation, you see, if the way I figure that if we just flush the whole Colson-Klein operation, particularly the Colson operation, and leave it to the National Committee and so forth we'll go right back to the situation that we were in where we get into battle after battle and then everybody looks around the table and says, "Who? Me?" Isn't that true? I just don't see any capability there. We've just, we've got to have some capability for a counterattack and for somebody who's thinking about the public relations...

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: ...on these various things and that's—I mean even though it has had its faults the Colson and to a certain extent Klein operation I think has had some effect that way. So, I think that we, when we talk to Chuck, we ought to visit the necessity of setting that up. Or do you see it that way?

Haldeman: Absolutely.

Nixon: As you know—But Bob, we've had one hell of a time with two people: with Kissinger, as we would expect, but with Ehrlichman also. You know they say, "Well that's the job of the [Ray] Price office. You know what I mean. We've got this beautiful program and that's the job of the writers, or that's the job of the, you know, the PR people." You know?

Haldeman: Well, Ehrlichman's changed that now, though. He, in the last few months when we've—really in the last the 4 or 5 months...

Nixon: He's done a lot better.

Haldeman: ...when he shifted from, you know, tossing it to other people to taking it on.

Nixon: That's good. That's good. On the other hand, we don't have it in the more important area of the Kissinger office. We have nothing there except just floating him out. But—but, I think that, I agree with you that after your talk with Colson that we have to maintain the capability...

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: ...and we ought to get a good, young, vigorous group in there.

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Haldeman: I don't think we can't.

Nixon: Huh?

Haldeman: I think we can.

Nixon: I agree. I don't think that he's the indispensable man at all—

Haldeman: And I think you—

Nixon: That's the point Connally made to me. He said that—

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: —He said Colson isn't—He said he's been capable. But I—Connally agreed with the point that I made, and it's like Henry after Vietnam is settled; Colson, in a sense, after the election is over, he isn't going to have nearly the interest. He can't have, you know, the driving force, the interest, and so forth. It's gonna be—There's nothing like going for the big prize.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: And just, you know, say, 'Well, now our project this week is to do what we can to see that our program on cutting model cities is properly presented.' See? *[laughs]*

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: It's not the same, is it?

Haldeman: No, not at all.

Nixon: And, uh...

Haldeman: And I think you can with a—

Nixon: With a new group you could—

Haldeman: —with the right people and a good crew you could get the—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —same level of interest in it then.

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Nixon: Incidentally, I was talking to Ron. That Italian story on Henry is the most—really—most—Did you see it?

Haldeman: I haven't seen it. Henry called me last night about it.

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Nixon: Oh, it's unbelievable. Unbelievable. It's unbelievable from some of the things he said, but another thing, too, is that it does, it's going to put water on the Rogers wheel to a great extent because Henry talks about the China trip, and the thing he said is, "Well, the thing about it that was really appealing to the public is," he said, "that I did it"—he, Henry, did it alone. He said, "People like to see somebody do something alone, and I conceived it all and did it all by myself, the whole China initiative."

Haldeman: Jesus.

Nixon: You know it's—it's so, so—Without any—He just doesn't go in at all under the... You know, when he thinks he's going to be quoted and so forth he does tend to, you know, pass the credit around a bit, but uh—

Haldeman: This is a point Rogers made to me yesterday that he said, "Henry is always very careful in what he says publicly to build up the president, but never privately."

Nixon: Well, I think he's got a point. And I think this is the—I think he's, uh...Rogers made this point?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: Uh-huh.

Haldeman: And this was before this article. He was just saying it in terms—He said, "That's one,"—you know he was cutting Henry as he does—

Nixon: But never privately?

Haldeman: "One problem you have with Henry is that he—whenever he knows he's going to be quoted he makes a big point of how, what a great job the president's doing, but where it really counts in the private conversations he builds himself."

Nixon: Um-hmmm. Well, the whole thing—Did you read—You haven't read the interview?

Haldeman: No.

Nixon: Where—Do you have the [*Washington*] *Post* there?

Haldeman: Yeah, I do.

Nixon: Isn't that where it is?

Haldeman: Uh—

Nixon: Take a look at it—

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Haldeman: No, it's supposed to be in the [*Washington*] *Star* I think. Lisa—At least Henry thought it was—

Nixon: It's a [Peter] Lisagor story, yeah.

Haldeman: —a Lisagor story.

Nixon: You don't have the *Star*?

Haldeman: Yeah, I have it.

Nixon: Why don't you take a reading, a reading of it—

Haldeman: I will.

Nixon: —and give me a call back, will you?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Fine. [*chuckles*] Ok.

Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: Don't bother today, though, and have a good time.

Haldeman: Ok.

Nixon: No, wait. But call me back today. I'm not going to leave until 11:30. Fine.

Haldeman: All right. Bye.