

Who is right in dispute over Watergate tapes?

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WASHINGTON — President Nixon's refusal to yield more Watergate tapes to the House Judiciary Committee is based on his contention that the committee already has the "full story" of his knowledge and actions relating to Watergate.

The committee, in subpoenaing additional tapes for its impeachment inquiry, contends it does not have the "full story." Who is right?

The committee's May 15 subpoena is for 11 taped presidential conversations with H. R. Haldeman, then White House chief of staff; Charles W. Colson, then special counsel, and former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell, who at the time headed the Nixon re-election committee. None of the 11 was included in the White House transcripts.

The conversations break down by date into three groups:

THE FIRST GROUP of two conversations were on April 4, 1972, from 4:13 to 4:50 p.m. between Nixon, Haldeman and Mitchell, and from 6:03 to 6:18 p.m. between Nixon and Haldeman.

The committee memorandum supporting that subpoena says that on March 30, 1972, according to testimony by re-election committee official Jeb S. Magruder, Mitchell approved G. Gordon's Liddy's intelligence-gathering plan, including entry into Democratic national headquarters at the Watergate.

In early April, the memo continues, Haldeman aide Gordon Strachan wrote a memo to Haldeman about the re-election committee's adoption of a "sophisticated" intelligence plan costing \$300,000. At 3 p.m. on April 4, Haldeman and Mitchell met and then went to the meeting with the President.

Did Haldeman or Mitchell tell Nixon about the \$300,000 intelligence plan? Did they tell him it would include electronic surveillance of Democratic headquarters?

THE SECOND GROUP of six conversations occurred on June 20, 1972, three days after the Watergate break-in. It was a Tuesday, the day after Nixon returned from Key Biscayne.

From 11:26 to 11:45 a.m. that day Nixon and Haldeman discussed Watergate. It was the tape of that conversation which has the 18-and-a-half-minute

That was the day on which the Watergate investigation was the subject of a meeting between Haldeman, Mitchell, White House Counsel John W. Dean III, chief domestic aide John D. Ehrlichman and Atty. Gen. Richard G. Kleindienst.

That was the day on which Strachan, according to his later testimony, shredded the memo including a reference to the plan for electronic surveillance devised by Liddy.

The committee subpoena seeks tapes of the following conversations Nixon had on that day: 2:20 to 3:30 p.m. with Colson; 4:35 to 5:25 p.m. with Haldeman; 7:52 to 7:59 p.m. with Haldeman by telephone; 8:04 to 8:21 p.m. with Colson by telephone; 8:42 to 8:50 p.m. with Haldeman by telephone; 11:33 p.m. to 12:05 a.m. with Colson by telephone.

That evening, Nixon also talked by telephone with Mitchell, but the White House says the call was made from a telephone not connected to the tape-recording system.

Were any of those conversations related to the cover-up when taking shape? Or was the President trying to get to the bottom of who was responsible for the Watergate operation?

THE THIRD GROUP of conversations subpoenaed by the committee could be the most crucial, because they involved the government's two major intelligence agencies. The three conversations were between Nixon and Haldeman on

June 23, 1972, from 10:04 to 10:39 a.m., from 1:04 to 1:13 p.m. and from 2:20 to 2:45 p.m.

That was the day on which Haldeman and Ehrlichman met with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director Richard Helms and Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director. The committee memo summarizing various other congressional investigations says Haldeman and Ehrlichman asked Walters to meet with FBI acting Director L. Patrick Gray III "to ensure that the FBI investigation of Watergate participants not be expanded into unrelated matters which could lead to disclosure of non-Watergate covert CIA operations or other nonrelated national security activities that had been undertaken previously by some of the Watergate participants."

Nixon in his May 22 speech to the nation said he asked Haldeman and Ehrlichman to ensure that the Watergate

probe did not expose any unrelated covert CIA operation or the activities of the White House "plumbers" unit.

The committee said Walters met with Gray and said the FBI investigation "should not be pursued into Mexico and should be tapered off at the five people" arrested inside the Watergate on June 17. Gray agreed to postpone two interviews relating to funds in the Miami bank of one of the five, Bernard L. Barker.

After the FBI resumed its investigation of the "Mexican connection" two weeks later, it found that the money in Barker's account had come from a Mexican bank account, which in turn had come from the Nixon re-election committee.

The June 23 tapes are being sought to establish if Nixon's concern was for the CIA and the plumbers, or for the connection between the Watergate burglars and his campaign committee.