

“Everybody Bugs Everybody Else”

Date: September 15, 1972

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: John W. Dean III

Participant: H. R. “Bob” Haldeman

Start Time: 17:24

Place: Oval Office

When the Watergate investigation exposed Republican efforts to bug the offices of Democratic National Headquarters during the 1972 campaign, President Nixon toyed with the idea of revealing that he, too, had been the victim of a bugging operation. During the 1968 presidential campaign, Lyndon B. Johnson had suspected candidate Nixon of sabotaging his Vietnam peace negotiations and had ordered FBI surveillance. But, contrary to Nixon’s belief, the bugging did not extend to his campaign plane.

John W. Dean III: The resources that have been put against this whole investigation to date are really incredible. It’s truly a [*President Nixon acknowledges*] larger investigation than was conducted against—the after-inquiry of the JFK [John F. Kennedy] assassination.

President Nixon: Ah.

Dean: And good statistics supporting that. [Richard G.] Kleindienst is going to have a—

H. R. “Bob” Haldeman: Isn’t that ridiculous, though?

Dean: What is?

Haldeman: This silly-ass damn thing.

President Nixon: [*Clears throat.*] Yeah.

Haldeman: Put that kind of resources against—

President Nixon: Yeah. For Christ’s sakes, to find [*unclear*]—

Haldeman: Who the hell cares?

President Nixon: And [Barry M.] Goldwater [Sr.] [R-Arizona] put it in context. He said, “Well, for Christ’s sake, everybody bugs everybody else. We know that.”

Dean: That was priceless.

Haldeman: [*Scoffs.*] Yeah. I bugged—

Dean: Well, it’s true.

President Nixon: It happens to be totally true.

Dean: [*Unclear.*]

President Nixon: We were bugged in ’68 on the plane and bugged in ’62, even running for governor. Goddamnedest thing you ever saw.

Dean: It was a shame that that evidence, the fact that that happened in ’68, was never preserved around. I understand that only the former [FBI] director [J. Edgar Hoover] had that information.

Haldeman: No, that’s not true.

President Nixon: I think that there is—

Dean: There was direct evidence of it?

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: There’s others who have that information.

President Nixon: Others know it.

Dean: [Cartha D. “Deke”] DeLoach?

President Nixon: DeLoach, right.

Haldeman: I’ve got some stuff on it, too, in the bombing halt study. ’Cause it’s all—that’s why—the stuff I’ve got we don’t ever use—

President Nixon: The difficulty with using it, of course, is that it reflects on [Lyndon B.] Johnson.

Dean: Right.

President Nixon: He ordered it. If it weren’t for that, I’d use it. Is there any way we could use it without reflecting on Johnson? I don’t know. Could we say the Democratic National Committee did it? No, the FBI did the bugging, though.

Haldeman: That's the problem.

Dean: Is it going to reflect on Johnson or [Hubert H.] Humphrey [Jr.] [DFL–Minnesota]?

Haldeman: Johnson. Humphrey didn't do it.

Dean: Humphrey didn't do it?

President Nixon: Oh, hell no.

Haldeman: He was bugging Humphrey, too.

All three laugh.

President Nixon: Don't doubt that.

Haldeman: [*Laughs.*]

End of excerpt.

“Richard M. Nixon, John W. Dean III, H. R. ‘Bob’ Haldeman on 15 September 1972,”
Conversation 779-002, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of
Public Affairs, University of Virginia.