

**President Nixon and Henry Kissinger
Lincoln Sitting Room
Telephone call, April 17, 1973
Tape 038-092**

Nixon: Hello.

Kissinger: Hello, Mr. President.

Nixon: Did you stay for the entertainment?

Kissinger: Yes, that was moving. One of the most moving things I've heard.

Nixon: You know, Frank's [Sinatra] voice has gone, as he told me before he came, but by gosh, the emotion in the room was just unbelievable. I think some of the people were crying.

Kissinger: Unbelievable.

Nixon: Did you feel that way?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. And also the tremendous dignity with which he did it. The way he spoke of you, and of the presidency. It was really a great evening. You said it very well, that it is [unintelligible] that you can have such an evening.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: [Louisiana Congressman Edward] Hébert was sitting in front of me, and he was in fact crying at the end.

Nixon: Who?

Kissinger: Hébert. Yeah. And [Rhode Island Senator John] Pastore was sitting next to me. He's just beside himself.

Nixon: Was he?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, rather a hard day, wasn't it?

Kissinger: Well, it was hard for you. I didn't know that you had made the statement [about Watergate]....When I think of the discipline with which you conducted the meeting in the morning.

Nixon: And then going through the evening.

Kissinger: And then going through the evening.

Nixon: The problem I have is that I can't look at it in the detached way I really should. *These people, Goddamnit, they're guilty, throw them out, and go on.* Just the personal things are...Goddamn, I think of these good men...

Kissinger: Who wanted to do the right thing.

Nixon: Yeah, it's going to splash on a lot of them

[...]

Kissinger: Well, the major thing now, Mr. President, if I may say so, is to protect the presidency and your authority.

Nixon: That will be hard because...

Kissinger: That is absolutely essential.

Nixon: Some of these people will even piss on the president if they think it will help them. It's pretty hard. I'm the only one, frankly, of the whole bunch who really didn't know a goddamn thing about it until March, when finally Dean came in and said, here's where it is, which he should have done months ago.

Kissinger: Well, they were in over their heads and they tried to, instead of stepping back and assessing where they were, got in deeper and deeper.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: But I think the absolute...I mean, to protect...

Nixon: Well, if we can. If we can, we will, and if we don't, what the hell.

Kissinger: We can, Mr. President.

Nixon: Maybe I've even considered the possibility of, frankly, just throwing myself on the sword and...

Kissinger: No!

Nixon: And letting Agnew take over. What the hell.

Kissinger: That is out of the question, with all due respect, Mr. President. That cannot be considered. The personality, what it would do to the presidency. And the historical injustice of it. Why should you do it? And what good would it do? Whom would it help? It wouldn't

help the country. It wouldn't help any individual involved. With all respect, I don't think the president has the right to sacrifice himself for an individual. And it would of course be personally unjust.

[...]

Nixon: Well, don't you get discouraged.

Kissinger: Mr. President, I'm not discouraged.

Nixon: You do your job. Two or three of us have got to stick around, to try to hold the goddamn fort.

Kissinger: You have saved this country, Mr. President. The history books will show that, when no one will know what Watergate means.

[...]

Nixon: Well, you know, nobody will really know what they put a president through on a thing like this.

Kissinger: Well, it's inhuman, Mr. President. These bastards know damn well that you couldn't have known about it. If one considers all the things you had to go through, you couldn't be a police judge too. You're running the government, you're doing all the negotiating, you're carrying a bigger load than any president has. On top of it, they want you to...

Nixon: Good God, we were going to Russia and China and ending the war and negotiating. I wasn't even thinking about the goddamn campaign, you know. I had nothing to do with the damn campaign, as you know.

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: That's the tragedy. I wish to Christ maybe I had, but if I'd been spending time on the campaign maybe we wouldn't have pulled off Vietnam.

Kissinger: If you can't rely on your own people to tell you the facts....

[...]

Nixon: Well, it'll be a great day on the other side for all of our enemies, won't it? *The Times*, the *Post*, the rest...Shit.

Kissinger: That's right, Mr. President. You have to gather the wagons and pull it through, as you've done so often.

Nixon: Well, what's really disturbing is comparing this goddamn thing to Teapot Dome, for Christ's sake, which was thievery on a massive basis. That isn't what this is all about.

Kissinger: That's right, Mr. President, and in a year that will be clear.

Nixon: It will take that long, I'm afraid.

Kissinger: Maybe less. I think the major thing now is to get the pus out of the system. Let it be squeezed out a little at a time.

Nixon: That's right.

Transcribed from Nixon Library White House Tape 038-092 by Michael Dobbs for King Richard, 2021