

**The original documents are located in Box 132, folder “May 2, 1974 - Interview, Today Show” of the Gerald R. Ford Vice Presidential Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

### **Copyright Notice**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

## RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4435 WISCONSIN AVE. N.W., WASHINGTON, D. C. 20016, 244-3540

FOR NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY



PROGRAM	The Today Show	STATION	WRC TV NBC Network
DATE	May 2, 1974	7:00 AM	CITY Washington, D.C.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE VICE PRESIDENT

BARBARA WALTERS: NBC Newsmen Garrick Utley and Ron Nessen are in our Washington studio now with Vice President Gerald Ford. And we are going to join them. Good morning again, Mr. Vice President, Ron, Garrick.

GARRICK UTLEY: Thank you, Barbara. Ron Nessen -- Mr. Vice President, Ron Nessen and I have a lot of questions we want to ask you, because I think there are many questions that many people in this country would like to ask you. And the first one is, in the past you've shown a certain independence from the White House on the Watergate issue. But last night in a speech at a news conference which we heard earlier in this half hour, you said flatly the President is innocent according to the White House transcripts. Do you say this now without any qualification whatsoever?

VICE PRESIDENT GERALD FORD: Based on the information I have, Garrick, the answer is yes. I've always believed that the President was innocent either of the knowledge of the Watergate incident itself and of the cover-up. And after reading a good bit of the transcripts, that huge volume, and after reading very carefully the news media reports, I'm convinced beyond any doubt.

UTLEY: Do you think that the White House decision not to turn over the tapes which were subpoenaed, but to send these thirteen hundred pages of transcripts to the House Judiciary Committee was an adequate response?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: In my judgment, it was. And I think you have to bear in mind that nineteen of those tapes which were requested, I think nineteen out of forty some, were actually in the hands of the committee, including the very famous one of March 21st. So roughly half of the tapes have been in the possession of the committee, and the transcripts

that they have verify what was on the nineteen, and the other twenty plus can be verified under the procedures set up by the President.



UTLEY: Well, the chief investigator -- the chief investigator of the House committee has said that there are some discrepancies, above all that some of the words marked "unintelligible" in the White House transcripts have been understood, or could be understood by the House committee investigators because they had more sophisticated equipment -- these on those tapes which were already turned over. Therefore, some people are asking, members of the committee and others, why not turn over the other tapes, and perhaps some of these unintelligible words can also be found out and determined?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I don't think there's any real problem. If the committee honestly believes that the transcriptions presented by the White House are not totally accurate, there can be a procedure worked out so that with the help of perhaps better equipment or better transcribers, the total amount that is relevant could be authenticated. I don't think there's any problem there.

UTLEY: Do you think the question of authentication must be limited to the guidelines or the rules set down by the White House that only the chairman and co-chairman of the House committee come down to the White House and listen to the tapes? Or do you think more members of the House, or perhaps members of the House committee staff could also listen to the tapes?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I wouldn't object, personally -- and this is my own view -- that perhaps Mr. Doar and Mr. St. Clair, accompanied by the chairman and by the ranking Republican, could listen to the tapes that they don't have actual possession of at the present time. I think that might be helpful to clear up any question of verification or authentication. I think there is some flexibility in that area; providing, however, there has to be the chairman and the ranking Republican.

UTLEY: Among the group listening to the tapes?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Right. Correct.

UTLEY: Do you think the White House would go along with what you suggest here as a possibility?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I frankly haven't talked to them concerning this suggestion I've just made. But I think the White House is truly interested in the totally factual presentation in transcripts of what took place or what the

conversations were. And if there's a better way of verifying it, I would say that the White House probably would do so.

UTLEY: One more question on the tapes. If Mr. Doar, the investigator of the committee, and the committee chairman came down, met with Mr. St. Clair and listened to these tapes, would you think it -- would it then be possible perhaps for these men to take the relevant part of the tapes back to the committee for technical verification or perhaps to use a more sophisticated kind of tape recorder to understand those supposedly unintelligible words?



VICE PRESIDENT FORD: It seems to me that this is purely a mechanical part of the operation. If there is better equipment available, I don't know why that equipment itself couldn't be made available by the committee at some agreed-to location. I don't think that's a matter of great concern.

RON NESSEN: Mr. Vice President, the committee last night did vote to send a letter to the White House saying the transcripts were not a satisfactory response to the subpoena. What happens next? Is the White House likely to send the tapes now?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Frankly, I haven't had an opportunity since the committee made this decision to talk with the White House. So what I'm saying is purely my own observation. It was a close vote, as you know, Ron, twenty to eighteen. So it wasn't a unanimous decision by the committee by any stretch of the imagination. I can't tell you right now what the White House will do. But I would hope that within reasonable guidelines, if there's any more way in which the committee could be accommodated, I would hope the White House would make some adjustments.

But I think you have to bear in mind that there is in the hands right now a volume of thirteen hundred and some pages of transcripts, plus nineteen out of the forty some tapes. I would honestly suggest that the committee delve into, read, analyze what they have before they make any further demands.

NESSEN: Well, you've said before that you didn't see any difference between transcripts and tapes and you didn't see why the White House couldn't send the tapes. Do you still feel the same way?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I think there could be more flexibility. But apparently the White House has felt that the procedure they have prescribed is a fair way of making all of the information readily available: the tapes, of which

there are nineteen, the transcripts on the remainder, and a method of verification by the chairman and the ranking Republican. I think this is a pretty good way of indicating a fair cooperation.

UTLEY: Barbara has a question in New York now.

Barbara?

WALTERS: Thank you.

Mr. Vice President, last night in your speech, you said that you had not read all of the transcripts, but you'd listened to the press, who always present the worst side first, the worst report possible. This sounded to many people more like Vice President Agnew than Vice President Ford. Do you feel the press has been unfair to you?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Not at all, Barbara. As a matter of fact, I've said many times I have good relations with the press, as far as I know. We don't always agree. But I've never felt, in a personal way, that they were ever unfair to me.

UTLEY: Mr. Vice President, the whole Watergate investigation, of course, has been a very emotional one. Up till now in Congress, at least, in the House Judiciary Committee, there've been efforts to keep it from becoming a purely partisan one. In view of the close vote yesterday evening in the committee, do you think the Watergate investigation is going to become a political, partisan issue?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I would hope not, because this is a very serious matter, the impeachment or non-impeachment of the President. And for it to develop into a partisan issue would get the House action away from the facts.

I know there are some very good Democrats who will not act in a partisan way on this serious matter. I suspect there are some Republicans who feel very strongly that maybe the President ought to be impeached.

So what the House and particularly the committee must do is to take the facts, relate the facts to the impeachment provision in the Constitution and make a decision on the facts. If it gets into a partisan issue, I think there'll be a great amount of disillusionment among the American people.

UTLEY: You say now the White House has laid out the facts in these thirteen hundred pages. Are you happy with the timetable, that it came at this time and not earlier?



VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I've said before, Garrick, I wish the White House had done this many months before. I think if the White House had indicated this before, it would have been a far better situation.

UTLEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. We'll be talking with you more in the rest of the hour.

We pause now for a station break.

\*

\*

\*



WALTERS: We're going to rejoin Vice President Gerald Ford in our Washington studio with Garrick Utley and Ron Nessen.

Mr. Vice President, I'd like to start off by asking you a question. There's a strong attack against you in the current New York magazine written by political columnist Richard Reeves, who voices some complaints that others have said as well. He says that you've been too busy traveling around the country, speaking for local Republican candidates, that you haven't taken seriously the strong possibility that you may well be the next President, that you're not informed enough on issues, especially foreign policy matters; and he quotes you when you were asked how you feel about being a heartbeat away from the President, as saying, "I don't think about it." And he says, "Well, think about it."

Mr. Vice President, how do you answer criticism like this?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I think twenty-five years in the House of Representatives and nine as the Republican Leader gives you a pretty good background on the issues. And all the time I spent in the Committee on Appropriations, listening to secretaries of State and secretaries of Defense, plus my contacts with President Kennedy, President Johnson and President Nixon, in my opinion, gives me a fair knowledge on the issues and matters of foreign policy. And I get weekly briefings either from Secretary of State Kissinger or his top aide General Scowcroft. I think I'm laying the groundwork for any additional responsibilities that I'm called upon to assume. I don't think I should sit around speculating on any additional responsibilities. I simply am preparing myself in a very practical, down-to-earth way for any contingencies that might arise. But I'm not going to worry about what might happen. I've got a job to do and I'm going to do it.

WALTERS: How often do you meet with the President, Mr. Vice President; how often does he brief you?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, that varies, because he's very busy and I am also quite busy. I see him at National Security Council meetings, domestic council meetings, and a variety of other gatherings with the joint leadership. I talk with him on the phone; I can't say every day we do it. But whenever I want to see him, it's always been an open door. And we have a very good rapport, and I don't worry whether I talk to him every day at a certain time. I don't think that's very practical.



UTLEY: Mr. Vice President, you may not speculate about your political future, but many other people are speculating about it. Do you think that if you were called to assume the presidency, one way or the other, you would feel prepared for it? Every man who, I think, approaches the White House has to ask himself the question, can I do it? It's a blunt question but it's one that everybody has to ask themselves, I think.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: In my honest judgment, if I were thrust into a position, a position higher than this one, I think I'm fully prepared both on the issues and on the capability of giving leadership. And so I have no hesitancy to say that I'm ready for whatever happens or transpires.

UTLEY: Are you anxious, are you ambitious?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Not at all. I have repeatedly said that I have no intention of being a candidate in '76, and I don't expect to be President between now and January 20th, 1977. But I'm ready for whatever contingencies might take place.

UTLEY: It's a rare political figure who isn't bitten eventually by the presidential bug. Do you think you can resist this bug?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I certainly have so far. And I have no reason to believe that I would change in that regard.

UTLEY: Getting back to the question of the White House transcripts. One thing that impressed me in reading them, especially March 21st, last year, the crucial day on which President Nixon says he learned for the first time in detail about Watergate from John Dean, and a number of White House meetings with Dean, the President and other of the President's aides, one thing came through to me, and that is there're all kinds of plans, tactics, techniques discussed as to how to handle this explosive situation. The one thing that was not really considered by the President was to come -- if I may

phrase it this way, to come clean, to fire everybody who apparently was involved in this or tainted by it, go to the public and say "I have discovered this; they are out; I present my case to you." This is the one thing that was not there.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, let's talk about the March 21st tape, which the committee has, incidentally. On that occasion, the President told John Dean to go up to Camp David and to write a full report, everything John Dean knew about Watergate. And John Dean, up to that point, had the full responsibility. Also in that twenty-first meeting between Dean and the President, and also Haldeman, Dean said to the President that he, the President, didn't know a lot of things about Watergate and that it was Dean's responsibility now to come clean to the President. And in that meeting, Dean finally told the President many things, and this shocked the President. And that's why he sent Dean up to Camp David to write this report.

At the same meeting, the President told Ehrlichman to start getting into the matter. Dean went to Camp David and never wrote the report that the President ordered him to write. And when that happened, then the President really gave John Ehrlichman the full responsibility. And at the same time, the President made a decision to work with Mr. Kleindienst, who was then Attorney General. And when it was decided that Mr. Kleindienst might have some conflict of interest, it was subsequently determined that the responsibility in the Department of Justice should be turned over to Mr. Petersen, who was a career employee and a registered Democrat.

So the President, having been told he didn't know everything, because Dean admitted that, then took a course of action which said "I want everything known to me either from the Department of Justice or from John Dean."

UTLEY: Well, this is one of the things that is subject to debate and interpretation, because when I read the tapes my impression was that the President wanted Dean to write this report, but more as a technical ploy, if I may use that, something the White House could then put out saying that Mr. Dean has reported to the President; he has found "A," "B" and "C," thus and so; and that is it. It did not seem to me, in my reading -- everybody has to make up their own minds -- that this was really an effort to get to the bottom of everything. And this is why I still repeat this question -- and you have already answered it. But I and some other people feel that the one question that was not entertained by the President was just completely coming clean. But this is something I





guess we have to debate.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: But I think you have to read the subsequent transcripts, as well, in order to answer the question you've raised. And I would agree that that March 21st meeting isn't as clear-cut as I'm sure the President would like it if he was re-writing the script. But the President later -- in some of the later conversations in the White House told every member of the White House staff that they should come clean, they should go to the grand jury and tell the truth, which they subsequently did. And furthermore, the President didn't know -- and this was a very sad thing -- that Mr. Dean had conspired with Mr. Magruder to send Mr. Magruder down to the grand jury and lie. Now Mr. Dean, in participating in that, I think undercuts his own credibility.

UTLEY: Mr. Vice President, we'll continue in just a moment. But now for a message from Barbara.

WALTERS: We'll be back after this message, Garrick...

\*

\*

\*

WALTERS: Mr. Vice President, to follow up on two of Garrick's questions, it was not until these transcripts were released that the President has come, so to speak, completely clean on such topics as the hush money and the reasons for payment for it. And also it's been revealed that he tried to block John Dean from having immunity which might make Mr. Dean speak more freely.

Do these seem to you like encouragements towards total disclosure?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, as I recall that part of it, Barbara, Henry Petersen, who was the part of the Department of Justice who had been given this responsibility, raised the question with the President that -- on whether or not Mr. Dean should be given immunity. This was a very serious matter, because Mr. Dean's testimony, according to Mr. Petersen, was very important in the prosecution against Mr. Magruder and others.

So it was not a clear-cut issue. And the President was getting advice from the top person in the Department of Justice who had the responsibility.

NESSEN: Mr. Vice President, there are, of course, ambiguities in the March 21st transcript. But there are some things in which there are no ambiguities. For instance, Dean



tells the President that blackmail has already been paid. He says "That is an obstruction of justice." He uses that expression. And he says it was by Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell and Dean himself.

There's no ambiguity that Dean told the President that Krogh, Magruder and Porter had committed perjury before the grand jury. There is no ambiguity that Ehrlichman told the President that the Ellsberg break-in could possibly lead to a mistrial. And there's no ambiguity that the President sits there and says "When you go before the grand jury, maybe you could say 'I don't recall.'"

Now, all of these seem to be crimes, felonies. And yet the President did not report them to anybody. As a lawyer, is it not a crime to know about a crime and not report it?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, I think you have to take what you've said in the proper context. The President was told these things. But he didn't have the factual information in hand, in writing. And he sent John Dean up to put all of this in writing, told him to go to Camp David and to come back with a full report.

Now, rather than just rely on a conversation, I think it's a responsible position for the President to tell the man who had charge of this, John Dean, to give him something in writing, not just a conversation. And, unfortunately, Mr. Dean didn't go through with that, didn't give the President that report.

NESSEN: Well, if somebody came to you and said a member of your staff had committed perjury, or if a member of your staff came to you and said that blackmail had been paid to keep somebody from telling something about you, would you go to a court, to a judge, to the Justice Department and tell them that a crime had been committed, as the law requires?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, isn't it proper to assume that the President first told his man that had charge of it to give it to him in writing. But, secondly, isn't it proper for the President, as he did, to get hold of Mr. Kleindienst, who was the Attorney General, and to discuss how they should proceed so the whole matter could be laid on the table, so to speak, as far as the court and the Department of Justice.

NESSEN: Well that was a month later on April 15th.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: But it was in the period that Mr. Dean was supposed to be giving him the report in writing.



And it was in that period that after Mr. Dean failed that Mr. Ehrlichman was given the full responsibility...

NESSEN: Why would the President give the responsibility for investigating crimes to a man who he had been told had committed a crime?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, it hadn't been proven. And Mr. Ehrlichman was one of his very top people. And he was told to pull the facts together so they could sit down with the Department of Justice and give the full story to the Department of Justice, which they did with Mr. Kleindiest, first, and, subsequently, with Mr. Petersen.

I think you have to bear in mind that you don't act instantaneously, because you have to get the facts. And all Mr. Dean said was in words, not in writing. And I think something as serious as this ought to be in writing before me or before a President.

NESSEN: Well, more generally, do you have, after reading what you've read and after reading the news reports, any doubts, any doubts at all about any actions by the President? Do you have any questions about the propriety of the way the President handled any of this?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I think as you re-play the whole scenario, going back to June 17th, 1972, that the White House, including the President, could have been more forceful in bringing the people from CREEP into the White House and saying, "Now, look here. Something's gone wrong. I want to get to the bottom of it. And you better tell me the full story."

Now as I read the transcripts, it seems to me that there was some delay. But as I think you also have to agree, the President was given the full story, even under the present circumstances...

UTLEY: Barbara, do you have a question?

WALTERS: Yes.

Just to change the subject in the minute that we have left, you were recently embarrassed perhaps, Mr. Vice President, because of your usual bluntness and honesty when you described what might be your cabinet if you were a Vice President [sic]. You said that you would keep Secretary of State Kissinger, that you would fire Ron Nessen [sic] and the Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger. Would you comment on this and tell us why you would not want to keep the Secretary



of Defense?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, really, Barbara, I never said that I would fire Jim Schlesinger. As a matter of fact, I've repeatedly said I thought he was an excellent secretary of Defense. But I did say, and I think it's a fact, he hasn't had the best relations with Capitol Hill, the House and the Senate. That's a fair criticism, and Jim Schlesinger hasn't minded or objected.

UTLEY: Mr. Vice President, thank you very much for being with us this morning during this entire hour.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Thank you very much.

UTLEY: Now back to Barbara.

WALTERS: Thank you, Mr. Vice President. There were a lot of questions to you, and you were very kind and agreeable to come in and answer them openly to us.

