

Special thanks to the [Presidential Recordings Program](#) at UVA's Miller Center for its help on this transcript.

Thanks to Jeremy Guttman for alerting us that short excerpts of this conversation have appeared in Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) p. 532.

The audio clip for this conversation (370-9) has been converted from a compilation CD produced by the National Archives and Records Administration of conversations related to Mark Felt. The CD is publicly available in College Park, MD.

Conversation No. 370-9, Segment 1

Date: October 19, 1972

Time: 1:48 pm - 4:15 pm

Location: Executive Office Building

The Nixon Tapes capture the moment when President Nixon learned that Mark Felt was leaking information to the press, although the conversation does not explicitly reference Felt with the Watergate break-in or cover-up. On Oct. 19, 1972, White House Chief of Staff H.R. "Bob" Haldeman informed the president that a confidential source at fingered Felt as a source of leaks. Nixon was incredulous, and asked: "Now why the hell would he do that?" Haldeman could not ascertain a reason. Both the president and the chief of staff weighed the option of whether or not to inform Acting FBI Director L Patrick Gray that Felt was a potential problem in light of preserving their confidential source. They also ponder how to deal with Felt and whether Felt was Jewish or Catholic.

Nixon: You know, materials are leaked out of the FBI. Why the hell can't [Acting FBI Director L. Patrick] Gray tell us what the hell has left? You know what I mean?

Haldeman: We know what's left.

Nixon: We read about it.

Haldeman: We know what's left and we know what's leaked and we know who leaked it.

President Nixon: Is it somebody in the FBI?

Haldeman: Yes, sir.

Nixon: What'd you find out?

Haldeman: Through a full circle through the—

Nixon: Department?

Haldeman: —the place where it's come from. The FBI doesn't know who it is. [Acting FBI Director L. Patrick] Gray doesn't know who it is, but he isn't. And it's very high up.

Nixon: Somebody next to Gray?

Haldeman: Mark Felt.

Nixon: Now why the hell would he do that?

Haldeman: It's hard to figure. Then again, you can't say anything about this, because we'll screw up our source, and the real concern is [*that*] [*Attorney General John N.*] Mitchell is the only one that knows this. And he feels very strongly that we should—we'd better not do anything because—

Nixon: *Do* anything? Never!

Haldeman: If we move on him, then he'll go out and unload everything. He knows everything that's to be known in the FBI.

Nixon: Sure.

Haldeman: He has access to absolutely everything. Ehrlichman doesn't know this yet. I just got this information. I'm going to tell him, but I don't have to tell him the source.

Nixon: Don't tell him. Don't tell him the source.

Haldeman: I'm not going to, but if we tell him the fact. Suggest that he—without saying that we know that—tell Pat Gray. He doesn't know anything about this, but he knows the fact that Pat should not have confidence in Mark Felt anymore. So, I think Pat ought to know that. He is not to do anything. The danger is telling Gray if Felt is getting ready to blow his sack.

Nixon: Gray is an [*unclear*] son-of-a-bitch.

Haldeman: And if maybe we should give him warning...

Nixon: I don't know. How about at the Bureau?

Haldeman: ...then maybe he should just be warned in here.

Nixon: Hmmm.

Haldeman: Because we've all dealt with Felt, and that's the guy.

Nixon: Let's do that.

Haldeman: Gray's scared to death. We've got to give him a warning—

Nixon: That's about their top spot. Ehrlichman had earlier mentioned utter confidence in him. [*Unclear*] over there.

Haldeman: This could fall down, but it's an awful way of happening.

Nixon: [*sighs*] [*unclear*]?

Haldeman: What got him—John Mitchell goes through a circle of [*unclear*]. It looks solid.

Nixon: What do they have coming out that you know of?

Haldeman: Almost out in *Time Magazine* is one more shot, and it comes directly from the same source in the FBI. It's out of their sworn statements. It ties Jeb Magruder, and [*Herbert*] "Bart" Porter, and the election committee [*CREP: Committee to Re-Elect the President*] in to the funding of the Gordon Liddy operation, which was involved—

Nixon: Does it mention [*unclear*]?

Haldeman: It's the same old story.

Nixon: Over, and over, and over, and over.

Haldeman: [John] Dean says there's nothing more on the FBI side, that that's as far as it goes on that and that we don't have anything.

Nixon: What would you do with Felt?

Haldeman: Well, I asked Dean—

Nixon: What the hell we—

Haldeman: He says you can't prosecute him.

Nixon: Oh, no?

Haldeman: He hasn't committed any crime.

Nixon: I don't want him to go out and say the White House tried to squelch him and all the rest. I don't want you to do that.

Haldeman: Yeah, that's fine. You might call him in here.

Nixon: What would that do?

Haldeman: I don't know. There're bizarre kinds of devices; you let him know that you know, and you transfer him to the [*unclear*; "town in Iowa"?] ...

Nixon: Do you let him know that he cannot write a book?

Haldeman: Dean's concerned if you let him know now he'll go on network television.

Nixon: Christ. You know what I'd do with him? Bastard.

Haldeman: He'd like that, you know.

Nixon: Hmmm. You've got to worry he'll finesse lots of people, this guy. Call him up, regardless. I'm going to recommend to Gray—I know you might want to say [*unclear*] give Mark Felt another position. Well, that's all I want to hear about. That's how we're going to deal with it. I knew somebody would break on it. It's hard to think what would make him do that, but there may be bitterness over there that we didn't put Felt in the top spot.

Haldeman: That's something [*unclear*]. I think he wants to be in the top spot. Dean—

Nixon: That's a hell of a way for him to get in the top spot.

Haldeman: Well, I'm trying to figure motives of his decision. You know he figured a lot of it. Maybe he thought—In the first place, he has to figure that you say in his presence—

Nixon: I'll take Gray.

Haldeman: —it is a possibility, or probability, that Gray will stay on.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: Well, if McGovern comes in then you know Gray is going to be out.

Nixon: Yeah. The other point is he's realistic enough of a political observer to [*unclear*].

Haldeman: Well, he's leaking. He's apparently, been leaking fairly regularly, so he has to know now [*unclear*]. We could argue that earlier. Then he could—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —maybe he's tied to the [*Edward M.*] Kennedy set. Maybe he's playing this game, building himself up—

Nixon: Is he a Catholic?

Haldeman: I don't know.

Nixon: Find out. Find out. [*Unclear*] Catholic [*unclear*], believe me

Haldeman: I think he's Jewish. [*Unclear*]

Nixon: Christ! I'm not going to put another Jew in there. Mark Felt is certainly a Jewish name. Well, that could explain it, too.

[*End Segment 1*]