

November 20, 2008

Reference No. 13740

Processing Note

A copy of this transcript was interfiled on this date from the Alpha transcript series.

Transcript only of this conversation; there is no recording.

The time of this conversation is not indicated on the transcript.

DATE: 11/15/68

TIME: Unknown

CALLER: George Christian, Ron Ziegler

Pages of Transcript: 4 pages

Barbara Cline
Archivist

CONVERSATION BETWEEN GEORGE CHRISTIAN AND
RON ZIEGLER, NOVEMBER 15, 1968

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GEORGE CHRISTIAN: Hello Ron.

RON ZIEGLER: How are you.

GEORGE CHRISTIAN: Do you have one of your secretaries on?

ZIEGLER: No, but I'll get one on right away.

CHRISTIAN: I think in all our conversations we should keep a record so we'll know what's been said.

ZIEGLER: I agree. My secretary is on now.

CHRISTIAN: I wanted to fill you in on what I am telling the press here in the way of background. I am presenting this thing as a very straightforward and cooperative thing all the way. I am telling them I have seen transitions before--of course not Presidential transitions, but State transitions, -- and this is the best one I have seen. That everybody seems to have the right intention. In alluding to the Press Conference yesterday and our subsequent statement today I am hewing to the line that certainly things like the NATO meeting were checked with the President-elect. Secretary Rusk, of course checked with Mr. Nixon before he made the statement that the President-elect approved before Secretary Rusk made the statement that he did approve.

ZIEGLER: Things that would carry over

CHRISTIAN: Not necessarily things that would carry over. That is not exactly accurate. Except for the NATO thing and except for the Vietnam negotiations during the campaign, they didn't bring up any particular thing that was a sort of lap over thing. Where we get into problems is approval of an action. He (the President) consulted with the candidates and with

the President-elect. He will take their opinions on this thing if it is something they are vitally interested in. The President can't abdicate his power. Up to the 20th (of January) he speaks for the country. After the 20th President Nixon speaks for the country and President Johnson supports him in every way he can. There will be timely ^{consultations} ~~meetings~~ with Ambassador Murphy now, and later with the Secretary of State-designate and the Secretary of Defense-designate, but decision making authority is as it was -- there is no other way to cut *it*.

Secondly, I noticed the UPI has just carried a story saying that the President-elect has acted to relieve the President's apparent irritation on the matter. That Harlow called President Johnson Thursday and again Friday to explain Nixon's statements.

And the AP has a similar story that doesn't use words like irritation.

This is essential to the country, so let's be careful not to intimate that the President is irritated by this. Actually, he is not. When we saw the story last night he was baffled. I was getting pounded with questions and there was no way to determine what had actually been said in New York. The wire stories said one thing and the others said another.

The President talked to the President-Elect last night when we began to get the impact of these stories. I have confirmed that Harlow talked to the President

last night and this morning. What I am telling these guys is that as I see the facts in these matters, the President and Nixon are playing square. There may be some rough spots, but they will work these things out.

These are two mighty high-powered men and please don't intimate inadvertently to anybody that the President is miffed. I mainly wanted to get this cleared up so that each time a decision is made a reporter will not be asking if the President-elect has concurred.

ZIEGLER: The indication I get here is that it has worked out. I think it is very important that we keep in close touch.

CHRISTIAN: What sort of questions are you getting on this now.

ZIEGLER: Nothing in the last four hours. Mainly questions of the approval.

CHRISTIAN: Keep me posted if anything develops so that we can keep this thing on an even keel. The press here seems to be satisfied that there is not a great conflict on this thing. Several of them who were in New York yesterday told me the questions sort of pressed on some of these points and created some confusion in what Mr. Nixon was saying...that he didn't have veto power, but at the same time he needed prior approval. The seeming conflict arose from questions and answers. They are reasonably satisfied there is not a major flap on this.

Anything that we can do to keep everything straightforward the better off we are.

ZIEGLER: I think it has straightened itself out here too. And if I get anything down in Florida I will let you know.

CHRISTIAN: One problem we may face in the next day or so is the news magazines. If you can help any to keep from getting this bad implication, then we are better off.

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