

50. Conversation Among President Nixon, Attorney General Mitchell, and the Counselor to the President (Finch), Washington, September 30, 1971.¹

40:22, 581-4 DECLASS

Nixon: Incidentally, when Bob [Finch] comes in, is there anything you want me to—I'm going to ask him to take a trip to Latin America for me for a month.

Mitchell: Good.

Nixon: Now, is there anything you want to—for me to talk to him about?

40:35, 581-4 DECLASS

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to South America.]

48:25, 581-4 DECLASS

Nixon: But Bob, what—the other thing I wanted to talk to you about, you know, Bob, was your trip. Did you—Do you know about the plan I have in mind for your—of a trip to Latin America?

Mitchell: Do you want me out of here, Mr. President?

Nixon: No, no, no. You listen, just for a second. I talked to Rogers on the way back from Alaska—

Finch: Yes, sir.

Nixon: —and, I have been trying to think of some way to have a, at this particular time, to have a, have sort of a handholding thing in, in Latin America. You know, I can't go because of the possibility—for several reasons: One, I don't have the time. Two, the possibility of demonstrations; it's too goddamn dangerous. On the other hand, the Rockefeller Mission, though, has weighed in on this at the wrong time. It's too broad and everything; it got us all committed in a lot of things. I talked to Rogers about it, and he thinks that it would be a very good idea if you took about a month's trip. And what I had in mind is to make it sort of like my '58 trip, except without the rocks.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 581-4. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The transcript is part of a larger conversation, 10:07-11:03 a.m.

Finch: [Laughs]

Nixon: You won't have any problems. But I would—And I would go to major countries. I would just pick—I'd go to Brazil. I'd go to Argentina. I'd go to— Naturally, I don't think you should go to Chile. But, if Rogers—if you talk to Rogers' men—but very—Bill is prepared to give you a recommendation on it. I can recommend, but then, without telling Bill, check the names with Kissinger.

Finch: I understand.

Nixon: Because—

Finch: Mr. President, I gathered—

Nixon: But I—And then—

Finch: —what you have in mind is because of the fact that they're taking the tail over on—under the—

Nixon: The goddamned surtax and everything—

Finch: That, that, that you want it sooner; the sooner the better. Is that the—?

Nixon: I would say that I'd—I think if you could work your speaking things out, and I think this would be a good thing to cancel. You should go out, and the way we'll do it, we'll, we'll, we'll build it up. I think we should build it up that you would come in and meet with Rogers and me. We'd have our picture taken. We'd have to have you meet the ambassadors before you go.

Finch: Right.

Nixon: Have intensive briefings, and so forth. My view is, too, that you probably ought to do Mexico, but I would not do Central America. If you ever get into that bag, [unclear]. And then, I'd do Central—I'd do Venezuela, Colombia, probably Peru because of Velasco, certainly Brazil and Argentina. Don't worry about whether they're dictators or not, because, there, the only friends we've got are the dictators. And then, maybe, maybe, maybe, some others. The problem you'll have is that—And it may be that you should do them all. You've got twenty countries. You know that's—well, that's, that's—You see the problem? The problem is that if you do maybe a—if, if, you had a—If you do all the countries of South America, you know, well, I would skip everything in the Caribbean. I think you've just got to start with that, because, otherwise, you've got Barbados and, and all those, and they don't

matter. I would hit all the countries in—the major countries in South America. You see, what matters to us? I'd rather have more emphasis on Brazil, for example, than I would on Bolivia. See? Brazil is a country that matters. Now, what I had in mind there, too, is that you would go not as one of the—You would not want to make big press while you were there, because you're not, you're not going to want to, you know to, to, to—I mean, I don't mind making press in the country, but having it come back here 'til you come back. But, on the other hand, what you would gather as a result of this is just an, an incomparable source of esteem. It's a hell of a thing to go for a speaking [unclear]. And I would just—I would take along if—you could talk to Bill about it—but you should take along a very sharp State Department fellow who speaks Spanish—

Finch: Yeah.

Nixon: —to do—both to, to work on it with you. I would not, like Rockefeller, take along a doctor and a [unclear]—

Finch: Well, he had, he had his own plane [unclear]—

Nixon: —staff, and I don't think you need all that. No, let, let me tell you—

Finch: I could take just, just, just [unclear] I've learned Tom Jarrell and a couple of people there—

Nixon: I've learned from [unclear] take a very thin staff; very thin, thin group, because—so that you are the center of the thing, rather than having other people jackassing around. And—In other words, you're going as the President's counselor to meet with our friends in Latin America to get their views about what we ought to do. And then, when we come back, by that time maybe we can do something for them on the surcharge. See?

Finch: Right.

Nixon: And I think it would be a—be quite an achievement. Like on Agnew, I'm hoping to Christ that when he gets home from Greece, or while he's there, that we are able to—the damn Greek government will do something about their loosening up a little, so it proves he did do something right—I don't think they will, but—

Finch: They may—

Nixon: But this—but this trip, this trip could be a—is a, is an important one. I don't know—I think if it gives you a [unclear]. I think it gives you a—it, it gives you something that is—that will be very useful to you—

53:16, 581-4 DECLASS

[Omitted here is Personal Returnable material.]

53:50, 581-4 DECLASS

Nixon: And so, I think the trip comes—The trip may give you a, a—frankly, a—a sort of a shot, so it doesn't appear that you're just around here. You know, everybody—We know what you're doing: working in Chicago with youth groups, and all the rest. But, I think the trip can be a helluva springboard. And I've thought of the possibility of your going to Africa, but goddamnit, there's no hopes there.

54:14, 581-4 DECLASS

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to South America.]

55:08, 581-4 DECLASS

Mitchell: Do you know Charlie Meyer well?

Finch: Yes.

Nixon: I suppose—

Mitchell: Now, Don Sullivan could be helpful to you.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah, I'll talk to him. I think—Do you like the idea Bob?

Finch: Yes, sir. [Unclear]—

Nixon: Yeah. But Rogers is all settled. I mean, he, he doesn't have [unclear] countries, and—but, he's all set to help.

Finch: I'll start with Rockefeller's list, and then we'll see how it plays out.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah, you can also talk to Bill, and then, then quietly slip in, because Henry will want to talk to you on this. But, tell him: let this, let this be Rogers' show.

55:41, 581-4 DECLASS