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White House Flip-Flop on CBS

THE ABRUPT switch by Rep. Gerald Ford of Michigan, the House Republican leader, that doomed the contempt of Congress citation against the Columbia Broadcasting System was dictated by the White House.

Senior presidential aides felt it would be most unwise to prosecute CBS and its president, Dr. Frank Stanton, for refusing to give the House Commerce Committee unused film shot for the documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon." Consequently, they convinced Ford he should oppose the citation he had earlier endorsed. That switch, combined with equally unexpected opposition from House Democratic leaders, killed the contempt citation which had been considered a certainty.

Stemming from this is deep bitterness among rank-and-file congressmen of both parties who feel their leaders needlessly humiliated the contempt citation's sponsors: Rep. Harley Staggers of West Virginia, chairman of the Commerce Committee, and Rep. William Springer of Illinois, the committee's senior Republican. In the Republican cloakroom, the bitterness is mixed with surprise, considering Ford's established

pattern of backing Republican committee leaders.

On the night before the vote, Ford and Springer spent nearly two hours together at the White House during a meeting on another matter. Ford said nothing about the contempt citation. Nor did White House aides indicate their opposition.

But the next morning was another matter. "The guys at the White House don't feel this should go through," Ford explained to colleagues on the House floor.

Springer protested, contending he was informed weeks ago, at the highest level, that President Nixon had no objection to the contempt citation. But with Mr. Nixon in San Clemente last week, Springer could not appeal the staff's decision.

Ford's switch may have made the difference. All but one of his fellow Michigan Republicans voted against the citation, including some who had been most vocal in the cloakrooms inveighing against CBS.

A footnote: Despite the defeat of the contempt citation, anti-CBS feeling is running high in Congress—particularly after what was regarded as an arrogant victory statement by the network. Whether this becomes a ven-

detta between the House Commerce Committee and CBS may hinge on a secret peace meeting to be scheduled soon between Dr. Stanton and Chairman Staggers.

Griffin's Problem

AT A RECENT secret conference in Nixon re-election headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Ave. here, President Nixon's top political operatives tried—without success—to talk conservative Robert Huber out of waging a 1972 third-party campaign in Michigan against Sen. Robert Griffin, the Senate minority whip.

Huber, a millionaire Detroit industrialist who nearly upset Lenore Romney in the 1970 Republican primary for the Senate, is organizing a new state Conservative Party. Its first project may be Huber's candidacy for the Senate, blighting Griffin's uphill race for re-election.

In response to the Nixon men, Huber conceded that Griffin had been a loyal Republican but insisted that systematic exclusion of conservatives from Michigan Republican Party leadership made a new party essential.

A footnote: Contacted by Huber for advice, leaders of the New York Conservative

Party (which elected Sen. James Buckley last year) discouraged both formation of the party and a campaign against Griffin on grounds that the New York and Michigan situations are wholly dissimilar.

Finch for Governor

SHARPLY reversing past plans, presidential counselor Robert Finch is now telling close associates he is more likely in 1974 to run for governor of California than against Democratic Sen. Alan Cranston.

The main political reason: Finch and his advisers for the first time are taking seriously talk from Gov. Ronald Reagan's aides that he will run for the Senate. However much he has slipped lately, Reagan is unbeatable in a California Republican primary.

But a personal reason may be more decisive. Finch's wife, Carol, has not enjoyed life in Washington and wants to return to the West Coast. Consequently, Finch may enter a crowded governor's race which could include Lt. Gov. Ed Reinecke, state attorney general Evelle Younger, and state Controller Houston Flournoy, all seeking the Republican nomination.

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