



WALTER HICKEL

"sitting tight"

Hickel Shift Suggested By Mitchell

By Don Oberdorfer
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Attorney General John N. Mitchell paid a recent visit to Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel to talk about the future, and suggested that Hickel might wish to tackle more important policy-making responsibilities, presumably in another job.

According to Hickel, Mitchell "never mentioned a resignation as such," but told him to "sit tight until you hear from me."

"I'm sitting tight," Hickel said.

The controversial and colorful Interior secretary gave his version of the visit from the attorney general—and his views on why he is in hot water with the Nixon administration—in a filmed interview for the CBS television program, "Sixty Minutes."

The interview is scheduled to be broadcast at 10 o'clock tonight on Channel 9.

Hickel made it abundantly clear that while Mr. Nixon has a "perfect right" to replace him as secretary of the Interior, he will want to know the reason for any such decision.

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"If I go away," he said, "I'm going away with an arrow in my heart and not a bullet in my back."

In recent weeks, White House staff aides listed Hickel in background talks with newsmen as one of the Cabinet members likely to be supplanted in the near future. The high-level leaks to the press that Hickel will resign were viewed in some quarters as public hints to the Interior secretary.

Hired by Nixon

Previously, Hickel had been quoted as saying, "President Nixon hired me. He will have to fire me."

On the CBS interview, the Interior secretary explained that he was asked to take the high post by President Nixon, not his staff members and not the news media.

"I expect that before I would leave all that, that the President would ask me to leave," he said.

The man who paid him the recent visit, Attorney General Mitchell, had a strong role in selecting the Nixon Cabinet in the late fall of 1968. Mitchell was Mr. Nixon's law partner, campaign manager and close confidant before becoming his attorney general.

Romney Statement

In a statement issued from his office yesterday, Romney declared, "I have not been asked to accept any other position by the President, the attorney general . . . or anyone else." The statement did not deny that he had discussed the future with Mitchell.

According to some accounts, Hickel has been in disfavor at the White House since last May, when he sent a letter to the President urging him to pay more attention to the voices of the nation's youth. Mr. Nixon had not received his copy of the letter when it appeared in the press.

On the CBS program, Hickel was asked if the letter is behind White House hostility towards him.

"I'm not sure that's it," he

replied. But he added: "It could be."

Another possibility, suggested CBS newsmen Mike Wallace, was that Hickel is too much of a "can do" man for the White House, and that his independent actions to protect the environment have been stronger than expected.

The Interior secretary recalled how he had taken Chevron Oil Co. to court over oil pollution in the Gulf of Mexico. The firm subsequently pleaded no contest to 500 of 900 counts of failing to take safety precautions, and was

financed \$1 million.

"I obviously wasn't owned by the oil industry, or owned by the conservationists," Hickel recalled, adding that he wasn't owned by anybody — "that's probably the problem."

"I maintained the decision I

thought was right for everyone concerned, never forgetting the administration nor losing my responsibility to 200 million Americans. I had to do it my way and maybe that's the problem, but I didn't have any choice."