

3/9/73

Watergate Quiz Fails to Shake Ziegler

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White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler has been the man on the firing line in recent days facing volleys of questions on the Watergate case and political sabotage.

The youthful Ziegler sometimes loses his patience, but he hasn't given an inch yet as he ducks and dodges, refusing direct answers apparently in the hope that the Watergate case and related issues will just go away with the arrival of spring.

Open day this week Ziegler fielded 71 questions thrown at him from every angle by reporters. He has become a master at avoiding a direct answer and at repeating endlessly that he won't reply because the question has been dealt with in the past.

Yesterday it was the same record over again, but worse. Twice Ziegler seemed stunned by the questions, the first being when he was asked if the President planned to withdraw the nomination of L. Patrick Gray III to be director of the FBI and the second when asked if H.R. Haldeman would follow his assist-

ant, Dwight L. Chapin, into retirement.

"There's no plan to do that," Ziegler finally managed to say when asked if Gray's nomination would be withdrawn. He was a little quicker in replying "he does not" when asked if Haldeman, the aide closest to President Nixon, plans to leave.

But the worst question was still to come. A wire service reporter asked if Ziegler was ready to apologize to The Washington Post for castigating it last year for stories/reporting that Chapin and Herbert L. Kalmbach, at one time the President's attorney, arranged payment to Donald H. Segretti for alleged political sabotage work.

"My comments stand," the unhappy Ziegler replied sharply.

Reporters repeatedly tried to elicit a response on why he and Chapin had denied that the latter was involved in the Segretti activity. FBI reports this week supported the allegation.

Chapin left the White House staff last month to join United Air Lines in Chicago. He had been the President's appointments secretary working directly under Haldeman, the White

House chief of staff and the President's No. 1 political operative.

After refusing to reply to a number of questions regarding Chapin's denial of involvement with Segretti, and Kalmbach's testimony that Chapin was involved, a reporter asked Ziegler: "Which man is lying?"

"I have nothing new to respond to you with, the unhappy Ziegler replied, "but it is that type of question that solidifies my position not to comment."

When a reporter asked if Chapin's departure from the White House had anything to do with his work in "supervising political espionage," Ziegler said he did not know how the reporter drew "the conclusion that you base the premise of your question on," and then said:

"Gentlemen, let me make one observation to you before not answering your questions on this subject. We've been down this road many times and I looked at the stories this morning and I have reviewed the stories and I have no further comment to them, because we've responded to them."

Then he complained about the release "of raw, unevaluated material from FBI

files" to the Senate and to the public. When asked if by that remark he was criticizing Acting FBI director Gray for making them available, Ziegler said he was criticizing the procedures and did not know whether anyone in the White House had complained to Gray.

A reporter, returning to the Chapin matter, wanted to know how Ziegler could defend the official denials of Chapin's involvement with Segretti and the criticisms he made of The Post for reporting on Chapin's involvement in view of the FBI reports.

"I've reviewed the transcripts of what I've said in the past months," Ziegler replied. "I see nothing new and I have no further comment to offer on it. But I will say . . . that I stand firmly on my previous comments on questions that were put at that time in relation to stories and I stand firmly on the comments that I made in response to your questions and also on the reporting . . ."



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Ronald L. Ziegler: "I have nothing to respond . . ."