

President Nixon was quoted today as having "absolute and total confidence" in his White House counsel, John Dean 3d, following publication of a report that said Dean had prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging incident.

Press secretary Ronald Ziegler said President Nixon telephoned Dean in Washington early this morning because of what Ziegler called "very extraordinary and serious charges" levelled against the White House staff lawyer. Nixon acted this way after reading a report by the Los Angeles Times that Watergate defendant James McCord last week told the chief counsel of the Senate special Watergate investigating committee that Dean and Jeb Stuart Magruder, former presidential assistant and campaign official, both had prior knowledge of the burglary at Democratic national committee headquarters last June.

Ziegler said that, based on President Nixon's conversation, "I will again deny any prior knowledge on the part of Mr. Dean." When a reporter asked if Ziegler was prepared to deny that Magruder also had prior knowledge of the Watergate conspiracy, Ziegler said, "I'm not prepared to speak for those who are not on the White House staff." He said Magruder has denied having had advance knowledge of the affair in the past.

Ziegler was also asked whether President Nixon telephoned Dean before or after an attorney for the White House counsel reportedly threatened legal action against any news media reporting the Los Angeles Times' story. Ziegler said that the call from the President came after that threat was made.

[Complete.]