

President Denies Any Involvement In Coverup Acts



CHARLES W. COLSON
... denies giving order

Clemency Report Also Called False

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KEY BISCAIYNE, Fla.,
May 7—The White House today, in a statement personally approved by the President, issued a denial of any involvement by Mr. Nixon in the Watergate bugging case.

"Any suggestion that the President was aware of the Watergate operation is un-

true," said Deputy Press Secretary Gerald L. Warren. "Any suggestion that the President participated in any coverup activities is untrue. Any suggestion that the President ever authorized the offering of clemency to anyone in this case is also false."

Warren was asked subsequently whether he intended by his statement to draw any distinction that Mr. Nixon was aware of a coverup even though he did not participate in it.

He replied by referring to the President's April 30 television address and by saying he could not go beyond it.

In that speech to the nation on the Watergate affair Mr. Nixon said he "repeatedly asked those conducting the investigation whether there was any reason to believe the members

of my administration were in any way involved."

The President said he had received "repeated assurances that they were not" and that he remained convinced that the denials were true until March.

Today's White House statement did not address itself directly to the question of whether the President had advance knowledge of a broad campaign of political espionage and sabotage, of which the Watergate bugging was only a part, according to investigators. Warren said the use of the term "Watergate operation" in the statement "extends to all the matters that are now under discussion." He did not elaborate.

The espionage and sabotage employed in the 1972

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Nixon campaign, according to investigators and White House sources, represented a basic strategy of the effort to re-elect the President and was designed to help Sen. George S. McGovern secure the Democratic presidential nomination. McGovern was considered the easiest candidate for Mr. Nixon to defeat in the eyes of the White House.

Warren's denial was in response to questions about a Newsweek magazine story which said that John Dean III, the President's former counsel, was prepared to testify that Mr. Nixon had congratulated him for keeping a lid on the scandal.

The magazine also said that John Ehrlichman, the President's ousted domestic affairs adviser, had emerged from a conference with Mr. Nixon and promised executive clemency for E. Howard Hunt, one of the convicted Watergate burglars.

Warren declined to comment on specific allegations in the article on grounds that any comment could "infringe on the rights of innocent individuals," a position taken by White House spokesmen on Watergate questions ever since the President's speech last week.

On these grounds Warren declined today to comment on whether the White House is looking into alleged participation by the Central Intelligence Agency in rifling the files of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. And Warren also declined comment on Martha Mitchell's suggestion that Mr. Nixon should resign.

Warren said his statement, though not the specific language, denying the President's involvement in the Watergate case was authorized by Mr. Nixon. Asked whether the statement was subject to being declared "inoperative," as

White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler has described, earlier White House statements about the Watergate case, Warren replied:

"That was different . . . this came from the President."

In other developments Mr. Nixon summoned former Treasury Secretary John B. Connally to the Florida White House for a conference amid reports from close Connally associates that he was reluctant to take a post in the Nixon administration. Connally gave up his lifelong Democratic allegiance last week and officially joined the Republican Party.

The President also met with his newly named interim chief of staff, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. to discuss staff operations.

While Haig was meeting with the President, Haig's office asked White House senior staff members to suggest "action plans" for specific presidential activities which would demonstrate that Mr. Nixon is still in command of the government.

The request was relayed through Kenneth Cole, now the administration's No. 1 domestic affairs official, and the responses were requested by 4 p.m. today.

One White House source said the action demonstrated that Mr. Nixon had no intention of resigning.

Meanwhile in Washington, Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar said the Watergate scandal was appalling but should not be allowed to destroy the credibility of government officials who were not involved.

"I had nothing to do with the committee to Re-Elect the President," Brinegar said in an interview with United Press International. "And I don't work for John Ehrlichman or H. R. Halde- man. I work for the Presi-

dent. I am trying to do my part as a cabinet officer . . ."