

## EMPHATIC STAND

### Any Prior Knowledge Is Disclaimed, as Is Role in a Cover-Up

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MIAMI, May 7 — The White House proclaimed anew today the President's innocence in the Watergate break-in and allegations of a subsequent high-level White House cover-up.

In a statement issued by the deputy White House press secretary, Gerald L. Warren, the White House denied that the President had prior knowledge of the Watergate operation. The statement, approved by the President, contained a carefully worded denial of Presidential involvement that represents the most emphatic comment in the matter yet issued.

At the briefing Mr. Warren read the following statement:

"I want to say this morning that any suggestion that the President was aware of the Watergate operation is untrue; any suggestion that the President participated in any cover-up activity or activities is untrue; any suggestion that the President ever authorized the offering of clemency to anyone in this case is also false."

#### Visit by Connally

Meanwhile, former Treasury Secretary John B. Connally, who joined the Republican party last week, held a surprise

meeting with President Nixon today amid rumors that he had been offered a high Administration post.

Members of Congress continued to press for an outside, independent investigation of the Watergate conspiracy to clear up any doubts about the integrity of the Administration and the Government.

Republicans and Democrats alike had sought, over the last week, to persuade the Attorney General-designate, Elliot L. Richardson, to follow the course that Mr. Richardson announced today in which he said he would name a special prosecutor. The statement follows published reports that John W. Dean 3d, former White House counsel, has told Federal investigators that the President personally had thanked him for his effort "to keep the lid on" the Watergate scandal.

#### Report in Newsweek

As reported in the current issue of Newsweek magazine, the statement attributed to Mr. Dean is the strongest allegation of Presidential involvement to fall out of the pall of recriminations that the attempted bugging of Democratic national headquarters last June 17 has cast over the Government.

The Newsweek article was the latest in a series of accounts in which Mr. Dean has reportedly indicated that he has a potentially embarrassing amount of information that

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he is willing to use, if necessary, to avoid becoming what he has described as the "scapegoat" for the White House. He has reportedly told Federal prosecutors that he will make this information available to the grand jury investigating Watergate only if he is granted immunity from prosecution.

A similar report also appears in the current issue of Time magazine, although only the Newsweek account figured in the developments here.

Newsweek recounted two incidents that appeared to Mr. Dean to indicate Mr. Nixon's knowledge and approval of White House efforts to stifle any reverberations of the Watergate incident. The first allegedly took place in September, and the second last December.

The first, Newsweek reports, took place in Mr. Nixon's office where Mr. Dean, the President and H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, discussed the success of Mr. Dean's effort to "keep the lid on" — apparently Mr. Dean's phrase — and Mr. Dean quoted, according to Newsweek, account, as having said to Mr. Dean: "Good job, John."

In the second alleged incident, according to Newsweek Mr. Dean conveyed to John D. Ehrlichman, Mr. Nixon's chief domestic adviser at the time, a plea from the lawyer of E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the Watergate defendants, for a reduction in Hunt's sentence. Mr. Dean, according to Newsweek, told Mr. Ehrlichman, who went into the President's office and "later came back with what he said was Mr. Nixon's promise of executive clemency for Hunt."

The Newsweek article generated a flood of questions at today's White House press briefing, but official spokesmen refused to comment on assertions made in that or other articles on alleged Government involvement in the affair.

However, Mr. Warren told newsmen that he would issue "an overall comment which I think is merited at this time."

He then read the statement proclaiming the President's innocence in the break-in and in an alleged cover-up, and added:

"Having said that, I would like to call your attention to our position, which will maintain throughout this matter. When you have investigations, grand juries, courts and the Ervin select committee all trying to get the facts and sort out the true from the false in this matter, we are not going to comment on various charges and countercharges as they arise. I am not going to be able to get into detailed ques-

tions and answers on various matters."

There was little doubt among observers here that the statement was issued in response to the latest series of allegations on the affair. That feeling was strengthened by the fact that the statement came after discussions involving the President, his press secretary, Ronida White House last night, appointed special assistant, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., who was summoned to the Florida White House last night.

#### Talks With Haig

General Haig, who is replacing H. R. Haldeman and reorganizing the White House staff, joined the President at 10:30 A.M. in a meeting that continued into the afternoon. The statement denying Presidential involvement were issued at 12:55.

General Haig's appearance here and today's statement confirm indications that the President has been unable to break away from the scandal around his Administration. In his nationally televised address of April 30, which advisers had hoped would lay Watergate to rest, the President complained of the distraction forced by the issue.

"Since March, when I first learned that the Watergate affair might, in fact, be far more serious than I had been led to believe, it has claimed far too much of my own time and attention," the President said then, and added:

"Whatever may now transpire on the case, whatever the actions of the grand jury, whatever the outcome of any eventual trials—I must now turn my full attention once again to the larger duties of this office. I owe it to this great office that I hold, and I owe it to you—to our country."

Since then, except for a long-scheduled summit meeting with the West German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and the release of long-completed statements such as the State of the World report and today's report on Radio Free Europe, the President's activities have continued to revolve around the damage done by Watergate.

#### Issue Still in Spotlight

In four days of seclusion at nearby Key Biscayne and an overnight trip to the Bahamas, nearly all reports of Presidential activity have touched on White House operations affected by the scandal.

Today's conference with General Haig and Mr. Ziegler was described as one of "discussions about the future White House operation and other administrative details."

Despite the insistence of Mr.

Warren that there would be no comment on individual articles about the Watergate scandal, there was one brief aside to the press when he was asked about the suggestion of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell's wife, Martha, that the President resign.

"I don't need to call your attention to the reaction of Mrs. Mitchell's husband in that," he said, and then added, "But I have no official White House comment on that."

Mr. Mitchell said yesterday that it was "ridiculous" for anyone to take seriously his wife's suggestion.

Neither would Mr. Warren comment further on the new guidelines on executive privilege issued last week by the new White House counsel, Leonard Garment. Although the White House asserted that the guidelines were designed to "hold to a minimum" the use of executive privilege by White House staff members — present and former — to refrain from answering questions, it appears to extend that privilege to new areas.

Mr. Warren also turned aside all questions designed to learn, specifically, when the President first learned of the Watergate affair. That, he said, was made clear in the President's April 10 address.

In that address, the President said, "Last June 17, while I was in Florida trying to get a few days' rest after my visit to Moscow, I first learned from news reports of the Watergate break-in."

#### Nixon Meets Connally

KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., May 7 (AP)—Mr. Connally held a surprise meeting with President Nixon today amid rumors that he had been offered a high Administration post.

The Florida White House announced at midafternoon that Mr. Nixon was conferring with the former Texas Governor at his bayside compound. "The President asked Governor Connally to come down," Mr. Warren said, but gave no other details, saying only that Mr. Nixon "wanted to talk with" Mr. Connally. Other sources said they did not expect any announcement to come from the meeting.

In Washington, meanwhile, there were unconfirmed reports that Mr. Connally would be named to succeed Defense Secretary Elliot L. Richardson if the Senate confirmed Mr. Richardson as the new Attorney General.

Mr. Connally was reported to have canceled a speech in San Antonio, Tex., on short notice today, saying he had been called away on a matter of highest priority.