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Ziegler Abhors Nixon Treatment

By Kenneth Reich and Howard Seelye
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San Clemente

Declaring that he is "fed up with Richard Nixon taking it in the ear," Ronald Ziegler, in a two-hour interview here, has decried what he termed the "vindictiveness of some in Congress and some in the Ford White House" toward the former president.

"I feel very strongly that what is happening to this man today — despite Watergate — is not right," declared Ziegler in the first lengthy on-the-record interview he has given since Mr. Nixon resigned August 9.

The 35-year-old former White House press secretary, who is about to depart his post as Mr. Nixon's chief of staff at his San Clemente estate, characterized as "absurd" White House statements last week about billing Mr. Nixon \$8400 for the portion of his flight to California in Air Force One that lapsed after the hour his resignation from the presidency had taken effect.

And he said he is "appalled" that White House aides and other members of the federal bureaucracy have been refusing to forward Mr. Nixon's mail and such personal property as political memorabilia and high school papers despite five months of efforts to retrieve them.

Beyond this, the withholding of the former President's personal papers raises serious constitutional questions, Ziegler said, adding that "what is happening to Richard Nixon as a human being" as a result of

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the treatment he is getting is "very serious."

"The fact that he has survived this period to me is remarkable," Ziegler said.

"What severity of penalty does this society want from a leader? You know, he resigned in disgrace. He is certainly a beaten man."

"If society wants to put him in a cell, there is a cell out there (at the estate)," Ziegler added in the Friday afternoon interview at the San Clemente Inn.

"Have you seen the size of his office? What more is wanted?"

The White House refused Saturday to comment on Ziegler's remarks.

Ziegler also discussed his own plans for a nationwide speaking tour at colleges, universities and before business groups beginning the latter part of February. He is signed up with W. Colston Leigh, Inc. of New York, one of the country's largest lecture firms.

A New York source reported that Ziegler's speaking fee will be \$2500, an appearance.

"Describing himself as entering a "recycling period," during which time he will visit San Clemente frequently to "be a friend to this man (Mr. Nixon), or help him in any way I can," Ziegler said that he plans to speak very frankly of his experiences "as a young man who became involved in government, was close to great power and was involved with a man who resigned."

He said he will welcome audience questions, particularly student questions, at every stop "because I want to know what people have on their minds, what they feel about Richard Nixon, what they think of me, what they think about his administration."

The thrust of Ziegler's remarks, however, went mainly to the conditions of what he freely termed Mr. Nixon's "exile" in San Clemente.

political exile — self-imposed, certainly self-imposed, but certainly exile," the former press secretary said. "You only have to be here to sense it is exile — the abandonment by friends, the isolation, the vindictiveness of some in Washington, including some in Congress and some in the Ford White House."

Ziegler pointedly exempted one of President Ford's aides, former Congressman John Marsh, from criticism, saying Marsh and an unnamed assistant had been "extremely cooperative" in trying to work out Mr. Nixon's problems with property that is being stored at the White House.

But he accused "many" White House aides of not being cooperative, and he said members of the federal bureaucracy who "fell over themselves" installing all sorts of equipment and conveniences at San Clemente when Mr. Nixon was President are now "unbelievably" eager to proceed with dismantling everything.

Ziegler said he did not believe that President Ford knows the way Mr. Nixon is being "mistreated." He said Mr. Ford, who was reported to have called to wish Mr. Nixon a happy 62nd birthday last week, had probably telephoned Mr. Nixon altogether only three times since his resignation.

Ziegler appeared particularly angry at the attitude of Ron Nessen, the present White House press secretary. It was Nessen who Friday had declared that \$8400 would be billed to Mr. Nixon's transition budget for the flight in Air Force One to California from a point near Jefferson City, Mo., where the hour struck that marked the effectiveness of the resignation.

"For anybody in the White House to say that Richard Nixon should pay for his flight from Jefferson City, Mo., to San Clemente, Calif., it's absurd," Ziegler said. "It would seem to me that any rational mind would say, 'Well, of course not.' Yet, it is suggested. It is unbelievable!"

"He was President when he left Washington. What was he going to do — alight

in Jefferson City, Mo., and make his way out here by train?"

As for suggestions emanating in Washington that Mr. Nixon had overspent his transitional budget, Ziegler said that for months the former President and his staff didn't know what the budget was, because it hadn't been set yet, and they were going by past — and as it turned out — more generous, example.

Now, he complained, White House spokesmen are listing staff expenditures that in fact relate to federal

agents who are at San Clemente to dismantle and cart away government equipment there.

"You don't even get your mail," Ziegler added, saying that among the mail not forwarded from the White House was his own Carte Blanche membership bill.

Not having received the bill, Ziegler said, he had not paid it and he said he had been badly embarrassed when he proffered the card for payment in a business establishment and was suddenly notified it had been canceled.

Saying that Mr. Nixon has incurred large legal costs as a result of having his lawyers negotiate with the White House, Ziegler remarked, "Richard Nixon has to pay lawyers in order to get his mail sent out."

The former President "knows he can't allow such treatment to get to him," Ziegler said.

"But this process is getting to me," he declared, "not in a bitter way, but just that it's not right."

The former press secretary also expressed particular annoyance with legislation adopted by Congress and signed by President Ford that deprives Mr. Nixon of papers and tape recordings he collected while serving as President.

"Read the legislation," he suggested to his interviewers. "Just read that legislation. Consider the precedents that could be set for our democracy, what they are doing to the executive branch.

"My point comes to this: If the private notes of Rich-

ard Nixon's conversations with Mao Tse-tung or his notes to world leaders, if they should be made public, then Senator (Sam) Ervin's conversations with (Watergate committee attorney) Sam Dash and the private

discussions of Senator (Lowell) Weicker with his staff should be made public too."

What is essentially involved, Ziegler asserted, "is not Watergate-related stuff — it's his personal property, and it's been lying for five

months to get it. In the interview, Ziegler did not go extensively into questions of Mr. Nixon's health. He indicated he believes the former President is "slowly recovering" from

phlebotomy attacks and an operation. Ziegler, who arrived for the interview on a motorcycle, looked fit. His hair is long enough to have developed a few curls.