

Nixon Admits Shift On Tape Summaries

Denials Issued

By Bob Woodward
and Carl Bernstein

Washington Post Staff Writers

The White House yesterday denied that it was giving copies of Watergate-related files to John J. Wilson, the attorney for former top presidential aides H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman.

Wilson said yesterday that he had received a copy of one set of notes from Haldeman's file after the notes were made public in court. But he denied that he had an arrangement with the White House to receive copies of all his clients' material turned over to the Watergate special prosecutor.

The Washington Post, quoting informed sources, reported yesterday that there was such an agreement between Wilson and the White House.

One of the sources in-

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White House

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Dec. 28—The White House acknowledged today that President Nixon had changed his mind about making summaries of key Watergate-related tapes available to the public.

Deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said that Mr. Nixon's previously announced decision to Republican officeholders that summaries of the tapes would be made public was being "re-evaluated." He denied, however, that this was because senior White House staff members had concluded that the summaries would be damaging to the President.

Instead, Warren laid heavy emphasis on events that have occurred since Mr. Nixon's promise to make the tape summaries public. Among these, Warren said, was the "indiscretion" com-

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sisted late yesterday that there was such an agreement and added: "The story nipped the arrangement in the bud." Copies of two additional sets of Haldeman's notes that have been given to the special prosecutor had been prepared for Wilson last week, but may not have been delivered, the source said.

Wilson is known to have said that he had such a permanent arrangement with the White House. Wilson said yesterday, however, that he "only received the one set of notes from the

White House and that was notes already introduced into evidence in court."

The notes were made by Haldeman of a June 20, 1972, meeting with the President and cover the 18-minute portion of the White House tape that was obliterated.

Wilson said that he "intended to go back for more notes from time to time."

J. Fred Buzhardt, special presidential counsel for Watergate matters, said yesterday that he was not aware Wilson received a copy of Haldeman's June 20, 1972 notes. "I didn't give it

to him . . . but he could have called someone from my office and they would have given it to him."

Wilson said he could not recall who in the White House gave him the copy of Haldeman's notes.

Buzhardt said that he has received several requests from attorneys for former aides under investigation in the Watergate case for information or copies from White House files.

"Wilson came over to see me about it," Buzhardt said. "I told him it was a very complex matter and no decision had been reached."

"It may well happen that we will provide the documents," in the future to Wilson," Buzhardt said.

Legal sources have said that any arrangement to provide lawyers copies of potential evidence against their clients may be improper.

Buzhardt said that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Wilson have received no special preferential treatment from him in gaining access to documents and information in their files. He conceded that others at the White House "may have" provided the two former aides privileged treatment.

According to White House sources and court testimony, Haldeman has continued to have unique control over his old White House files since his resignation as the president's chief of staff last April 30.

Haldeman's successor, Gen. Alexander M. Haig, and Lawrence Higby, Haldeman's former personal aide, both testified in a court hearing this month that the White House was not provided the combination to the lock on Haldeman's files when he left the White House.

Higby, now a deputy in the Office of Management and Budget, testified that he was instructed by Haldeman not to turn over some of his old notes to Haig or the special prosecutor until Higby had first read them back to Haldeman. The notes in question were those of the June 20, 1972, meeting that Wilson received from the White House.

In a telephone interview

yesterday, Buzhardt also questioned a report in yesterday's Post quoting a White House official who said that Buzhardt is extremely unhappy at the White House and wants to leave in the next three or four months.

"I'm not fed up and ready to leave," Buzhardt said. "I never quit anything in my life . . . I undoubtedly have voiced frustration, but I'm not throwing in the towel. I'm going to stay until the job is over."

"I will be 50 at the end of February, and I could retire with a pension," Buzhardt said.

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mitted by attorney William Dobrovir when he played portions of a tape in his custody at a Georgetown cocktail party and the demand for many additional tapes and documents by the Senate Watergate committee.

Warren's statement came in response to questions about a story in The Washington Post on Friday which said that Mr. Nixon would not make public the promised tape summaries.

Even though Warren denied that the summaries would implicate Mr. Nixon in the Watergate coverup, he conceded that there were ambiguities in the tapes that "could lead to confusion in the minds of the American public and further distortion of the matter."

The White House response to the story about Mr. Nixon's changing view on the release of the tape summaries was coordinated between San Clemente and Washington, where departing presidential counselor Melvin R. Laird said that senior White House aides were completely convinced of the President's innocence.

On several occasions during the past year, other high-ranking White House officials have made little secret of their annoyance at Laird's independence and habit of speaking his mind freely about the administration.

Today, Warren pointedly associated the White House with Laird's remarks and made it clear Laird was speaking for the administration.

"There is not a senior counselor on the staff of the White House who has any doubt about the innocence of the President of the United States with regard to the cover-up," Laird said. "Everyone has admiration and respect for the President and believes in his innocence . . . I have talked to them all, I know their attitude."

Warren said that this statement "accurately reflected the attitude of the senior staff in the White House."

The Washington Post story said that two presidential aides who had consistently maintained that Mr. Nixon was not involved in the conspiracy to cover up Watergate were no longer convinced. The story also quoted senior presidential aides as saying the White House tape recordings indicate that, at a minimum,

Mr. Nixon had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up several days before his announcement of it on March 21, 1973.

Both Laird and Warren said that long-delayed reports on the White House role in two other controversies—the ITT affair and the milk fund case—would be made public as promised by Mr. Nixon.

These reports apparently will be released in mid-January soon after Mr. Nixon has previewed them at a meeting with Republican congressional officials.

One of the major concerns now within the White House is that GOP congressmen and governors will conclude that Mr. Nixon is abandoning the public disclosure policy known as "Operation Candor."

Beginning in November, the President promised in a series of meetings with GOP officeholders to face the accusations against him with a series of disclosures about Watergate, the ITT and milk fund affairs and his personal finances. So far, only the report on presidential finances has been forthcoming.

Mr. Nixon spent most of the morning with chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. and press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, his two principal assistants.

Haig and his secretary flew to San Clemente on Thursday evening to bring to 26 the known number of White House officials who have flown to the West coast by commercial airliner to join Mr. Nixon here. This total does not include at least 12 Secret Service agents who accompanied the President on his surprise flight from Washington to Los Angeles last Wednesday.

The last time that the President was in California, his aides followed a policy known as "Operation Openness" in which staff members were freely provided for interviews on policy questions. In line with the de-emphasis of "Operation Candor," however, aides have on the present trip remained secluded and inaccessible within the presidential compound at San Clemente.