

Nixon Orders Staff to Testify On Watergate

Aides Directed To Appear at Grand Jury

By Lou Cannon
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President Nixon has directed White House staff members to testify before a federal grand jury investigating the Watergate bugging conspiracy and has paved the way for White House aides to appear before a Senate committee also probing the case.

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler made the announcement yesterday in what he said was an effort to "dispel the myth . . . that we seek to cover up."

Ziegler called the announcement a restatement of the White House intention to cooperate with Watergate investigators. However, he has in the past declined to respond to questions about whether White House counsel John W. Dean III would testify before the grand jury.

Ziegler has said previously that White House staff members could show their cooperation with the Senate committee by giving written responses to committee questions. He said yesterday that it might now be possible for the administration and the committee to work out a procedure where responses could be made "other than in writing."

The White House appeared to be replying to various charges by Republican senators that the administration was obstructing the Watergate investigation. Without naming any senators, Ziegler said his statement was made to clear

up "misapprehensions" about White House policy.

"The President wants it made clear it has not been and is not and will not be the objective of the White House to cover up or withhold any information on the Watergate matter," Ziegler said.

On Thursday, Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), said that the entire operation came under the direction of "somebody still in the White House."

"No one in the White House had any involvement or prior knowledge of the event," Ziegler said yesterday.

Ziegler also criticized what he said were "unsubstantiated charges leaked from the Senate select committee headed by Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.). Senate sources have said that James W. McCord Jr., one of the seven convicted Watergate conspirators, told the committee that both former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson had prior knowledge of the Watergate burglary.

This has been denied by Mitchell and by Colson.

"It is evident that personal rights have been abused in a very serious way by procedures that are less than orderly and judicial," Ziegler said.

The White House press secretary did not spell out what

See **PRESIDENT, A11, Col. 1**

PRESIDENT, From A1

procedures could be worked out that would permit White House aides to testify without violating President Nixon's understanding of executive privilege between the President and his staff

There was some speculation that any procedure would mean the production of White House aides in an informal proceeding where they would not be under oath. But Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), the ranking minority member on the investigating committee, interpreted the statement differently.

"I took this to be an invitation to negotiate," Baker said. "I'm hopeful that we can get the people who have been mentioned in newspaper accounts and otherwise to appear before the committee under oath. I'm encouraged by Ziegler's comments that something along these lines will be worked out."

Baker said he didn't know what limitations on White House staff testimony Ziegler had in mind but he suggested two of his own—a time limit on testimony and restricting the questions to the 1972 campaign.

Ervin, attending the funeral

3-31-73 WBS-
of a brother in North Carolina, was unavailable for comment.

Weicker, another member of the committee, took a dim view of Ziegler's comments about the grand jury availability of White House aides. The Connecticut senator said that "many of the White House aides didn't know about the Watergate itself—to permit them to go before the grand jury is another attempt to keep the campaign espionage in the narrowest area."

The mandate of the committee extends far beyond the Watergate issue to the question of alleged widespread political spying and sabotage against the Democrats last year.

Several present or former White House aides testified last summer before the grand jury which subsequently indicted the seven Watergate defendants. Prosecutor Earl Silbert said yesterday that other White House aides may be called.

"If they have any material to add we will call them, but we want to talk to the seven conspirators first," Silbert said. Of the seven, two were convicted and five pleaded guilty.

Meanwhile, a former Republican presidential candidate spoke up against the Watergate espionage.

Alfred M. Landon, the 1936 presidential nominee, said in a telephone interview from Topeka yesterday that he plans to tell President Nixon soon of strong grass-roots concern that has come to his attention about White House handling of the Watergate case.

Landon said the case "stinks to high heaven" and that under the circumstances perhaps Mr. Nixon ought to permit those aides named to testify.

Landon said he thought recommendations of Sens. Robert W. Packwood (R-Ore.) and Charles McC. Mathias Jr. (R-Md.) Thursday that the President appoint a special investigator of high repute to inquire into all aspects of the Watergate "seems to me to be a very valuable suggestion for the President to follow."

Packwood proposed former Sen. John J. Williams (R-Del.) as an investigator and Mathias suggested former Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.). Landon said either of them would have great public confidence.