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WASHINGTON

Whether President Nixon achieves any long-range objective out of his Oct. 9 Saturday night massacre may be answered in a critical decision awaiting Leon Jaworski as the new special prosecutor: Shall he press the investigation of the White House "Plumbers" unit begun by Archibald Cox?

The desires of the White House are unmistakable. It wants Jaworski to forget about the Plumbers, drop Cox's unfulfilled demands for documents concerning the Plumbers, and quickly get rid of the Kennedy Democrat still in charge of this investigation.

If Jaworski takes that course, the White House will in fact have the special prosecutor it wants. Beyond the Plumbers, Nixon lieutenants want Jaworski to focus narrowly on the Watergate burglary and dismantle Cox's investigations into other matters. If that results in angry resignations by Cox's task force chiefs, so much the

better in the eyes of the White House. The ordeal of the Saturday night massacre will not have been in vain.

Nothing has dismayed the White House more than the aggressive investigation of the Plumbers by the Cox task force under William Merrill, assistant chief U.S. attorney in Detroit during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Nixon aides believe Merrill's investigation of the 1971 burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office intends to implicate Nixon himself. Indeed, the Merrill task force, interested in more than mere burglaries, wants to expose a pattern of illegitimate governmental powers.

Understandably, then, Cox encountered special White House resistance against supplying documents about the Plumbers. As Cox testified before the Senate judiciary committee, his requests on Aug. 23 for a long list of such papers (including records of mysterious Plumbers assignments called "Special Project No. M-1" and "Project Odessa") were ignored.