

Nixon Erasure Role Denied

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The White House yesterday denied that President Nixon deliberately or accidentally erased the missing segment of a taped conversation with former aide H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, but it declined to provide any information on what might have happened.

Obviously shaken by the report on the tape by a technical panel it helped choose, the White House said it would be inappropriate for it to comment on the latest development in the tapes controversy while the matter is under court review.

It asked that the public reserve judgment until all the facts are in. However,

many members of Congress were sharply critical of the President, and Sen. William E. Brock (R-Tenn.), head of the Senate Republican campaign committee, said he was "just completely frustrated."

At the beginning of his press briefing, White House spokesman Gerald L. Warren distributed a prepared statement from James D. St. Clair, the President's counsel, which made it clear Warren would answer few if any questions on the matter, which has raised anew speculation about Watergate and the President's role.

"Further discussion would be improper while this matter is in the court," the St. Clair statement said.

See **PRESIDENT, A6, Col. 3**

about the tape, Brock said he was "depressed and concerned." The GOP has been "wounded severely," he said.

When asked what he was telling prospective candidates, he replied: "I'm saying don't run on the basis of any label, be it the Nixon administration or the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. Run on your own merit. Run on your own platform."

On the other hand, Sen. William L. Scott (R-Va.) defended the President. In a dispatch from Norfolk, the Associated Press quoted him as saying that if he were President and if there was anything incriminating on the tapes "I'd have burnt the darn things up long ago."

In Boston, House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill (D-Mass.) said he would not be surprised if Vice President Ford becomes the next President — "and I don't mean elected President."

At the White House, Warren volunteered a statement to the effect that he had mistakenly denied the day before any White House involvement in Ford's speech Tuesday before the American Farm Bureau Federation.

"I have checked it thoroughly and at the request of the Vice President the White House speech writers did assist him in formulating ideas he wanted to put across," Warren said.

"We have done that from time to time but we have done it at the Vice President's request."

In the Farm Bureau speech, Ford assailed Mr. Nixon's critics and accused them of waging "a massive propaganda campaign" in their drive to impeach him.

Ford said yesterday that while the White House speech writers wrote the first draft of the speech "the final result was mine."

On Capitol Hill, Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (D-Tex.) said Ford "has willingly accepted the White House role assigned to him as a divisive political foil; in his Farm Bureau speech, Mr. Ford clearly adopted Agnew-like tactics and has himself injected rancor and partisanship into the Watergate case."

PRESIDENT, From A1

Declaring that the hearing in Judge John J. Sirica's court "has only begun," St. Clair said that "other technical testimony has yet to be heard. Cross-examination has hardly been initiated.

"Thus, premature judgments about the causes of that gap in the White House tape are altogether unwarranted."

Warren would not say what "other technical testimony" might involve or whether the White House had employed its own technical advisers to study the 18½-minute erasure of the June 20, 1972, tape.

When he was asked directly whether the President erased the tape, Warren said: "There has been a great deal of testimony and there will be other testimony. The answer to your question is no, but I am not going to take questions on this matter."

Asked how he knew that the President was not involved in that tape erasure, Warren replied that there have been "many discussions about this matter with the President."

Warren was then asked whether his denial of an erasure by the President covered both deliberate and accidental erasure, and he said that it did.

Usually calm in the face of tough questioning, Warren became irritated with the persistent attempts to draw him out on the question of the erased tape.

"You are spending time which could be spent on other

matters," he said with unusual irritation.

On Capitol Hill, the critical comments that began Tuesday when news of the panel's report on the erasure was first reported continued unabated.

Brock, who headed the Nixon campaign's youth drive in 1972, said in a CBS News interview that he felt "we keep getting hit with new shoes. . . I feel like I've been dealing with a centipede this last year."

"How many new revelation or disclosures are going to be required to break the camel's back?" he asked. "I just can't predict anymore. I've given it up."

Asked specifically for his reaction to the new disclosure