



# GOP Chief Morton Named As New Interior Secretary

## White House Showdown

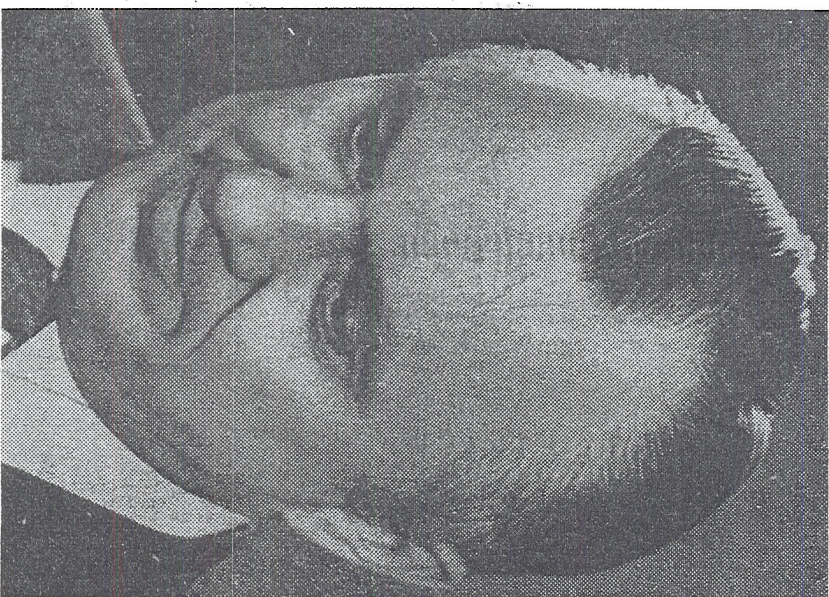
*Times-Post Service*

Washington

President Nixon fired Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel last night because of a lack of "mutual confidence," and announced he would nominate Republican National Chairman Rogers C. B. Morton as his successor.

Mr. Nixon summoned Hickel to the White House, "requested the resignation and accepted it" immediately, said Presidential press secretary Ronald Ziegler.

When Hickel arrived, he was ushered into the President's office for one of the



WALTER J. HICKEL AT THE INTERIOR DEPARTMENT  
'I have to do it my way'

*AP Wirephoto*



few times he has seen Mr. Nixon alone. Even then, John N. Ehrlichman, assistant to the President, was in the room for part of the 25-minute meeting.

#### STATEMENT

About two hours later, Hickel made a brief, off-the-cuff statement for newsmen crowded into an interior department conference room.

"Given the hostility toward me when I first arrived, some of those incredible decisions I had to make immediately afterward, trying to do a job for the President and all Americans and somehow survive as an individual, I have to do it my way," he said.

He walked out without waiting for reporters' questions.

"This decision is not related to any specific incident," Ziegler said in answer to questions. "The President had this under consideration for some time and made his decision early this week.

"The President feels that the required elements for a

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good and continued relationship which must exist between the President and his Cabinet members simply did not exist in this case."

#### INTERVIEW

Ziegler said that Mr. Nixon did not see the Tuesday night television interview on CBS in which Hickel frankly discussed his uncertain future in the Nixon Cabinet.

"If I go away," Hickel said in the interview, "I'm going with an arrow in my heart and not a bullet in my back." Previously, Hickel had said that "President Nixon hired me. He will have to fire me."

Hickel reported that Attorney General John N. Mitchell recently called on him to discuss Hickel's future, a clear indication that the President wished to have his resignation.

But Hickel insisted on a direct confrontation, which Mr. Nixon apparently was loath to undertake.

It was the first time he had fired a high official and the

sion, asking for greater Administration concern for the attitude of youth, was the chief reason for the lack of confidence in Hickel, Ziegler stuck to his point that "no specific incident" was involved.

#### OPINIONS

Some White House officials have insisted that Hickel was a poor administrator and not an effective policy maker.

But Hickel's friends have insisted he fell into disfavor because he dared question Administration policy and took an independent line on various issues.

Senator Gaylor Nelson (D-Wis.), one of those who voted against Hickel's confirmation last year, said "conservationists have lost a great fighter and a great friend."

Nelson said he voted against Hickel because he thought he did not have a broad environmental background, but "it turns out he had a great instinct for what was right and the guts to act on his convictions."

Nelson said he thought Hickel was fired because he "trampled in too many powerful toes, including the oil people."

Hickel said in the TV interview that he might have offended sensibilities by doing things "my way" as an Interior Secretary who wasn't "owned" by anybody, from oil interests to conservationists.

Yesterday's announcement did not greatly surprise the capital.

A colorful and combative figure, Hickel had incurred the wrath of the President and his associates when, after the Cambodian invasion, a letter in which he criticized Mr. Nixon for insensitivity to the aspirations of the country's young people leaked to the press. It has never been established who leaked the letter, but Hickel was never able to recover his standing at the White House thereafter.

Hickel, 51, a former Alaska governor, played a major role during Nixon's 1968 successful campaign for the Presidency and made several speaking engagements on behalf of Republican candidates in the recent mid-term elections. But he continued to convey his doubts about the administration's approach toward youth, and on September 25 spoke out against the "rhetoric of polarization."

#### BITTERNESS

Apparently aware that his future with the Nixon Administration was at best uncertain, Hickel has spoken bitterly in private conversations in recent days of his relationship with the White House and some of Nixon's associates, including H. R. Healdeman, the chief of staff at the White House, and Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on national security affairs.

There was general agreement on Capitol Hill that Morton's nomination would be easily approved by the Senate. He is widely liked by both Democrats and Republicans.

Morton had been reported unhappy in recent months over his lack of political pull at the White House, where Murray Chotiner, an oldtime Nixon political strategist, played an important role in recent mid-term election campaign.

Morton, too, is said to have expressed interest in the Interior Department — a position for which he was considered when Nixon made his original cabinet appointments.



UPI Telephoto

ROGERS MORTON  
President's choice

first such abrupt Cabinet firing since President Truman dismissed Attorney General J. Howard McGrath in a dispute over a political corruption investigation.

When asked if the famous Hickel letter to the President after the Cambodian inva-