

Ehrlichman Scores Justice Aide, FBI

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President Nixon's chief domestic adviser, John D. Ehrlichman, acknowledged yesterday that the White House had asked the Justice Department to provide political advice on "problem areas in the criminal justice field" for the president's re-election campaign.

But he criticized an unnamed aide to Deputy Attorney General Ralph E. Erickson—and, by implication, the FBI itself—for passing the request along to FBI field offices for assistance in assembling the material.

Ehrlichman defended the consultation with the Justice Department, which he said must remain "responsive to the political system."

He said, however, that it was improper to involve the FBI, asserting that the bureau must be nonpolitical in order to maintain "total credibility and objectivity."

Time magazine first revealed the White House request over the weekend, when it reported that L. Patrick Gray III, acting FBI director, had passed the urgent White House request along to 21 bureau field offices in 14 states.

Ehrlichman stressed yesterday that "it isn't going to happen again."

For the FBI's part, there was no acknowledgement that anything had happened at all. Spokesman for the bureau declined to comment, and Gray told newsmen in Richmond, where he was visiting the local field office, "I don't have any comment on what Time magazine reported. Let Time magazine comment on what it reported."

But John W. Hushen, public information officer for the Justice Department, con-

firmed the FBI's involvement, saying "They apparently made the decision to help out." He said the FBI field offices' replies to the White House query had been forwarded to

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Ehrlichman through Erickson's office.

It was not immediately clear whether Gray, who has vowed to operate the bureau as a nonpolitical agency, was personally aware of the FBI role in the matter. Since he has been traveling widely in recent weeks, many of the FBI director's functions have been handled by his subordinates.

At the White House and the Justice Department, the blame was placed on staff aides.

Ehrlichman said that Time was incorrect in attributing the request to him personally. He explained that the directive was one of a number sent to different cabinet departments requesting information.

The White House yesterday released the text of the directive sent to Erickson, dated Sept. 1 and signed by Geoff Shepard, a member of Ehrlichman's staff.

Titled "Information for Campaign Trips: Events and Issues," it said, "Please limit yourself to problems of sufficient magnitude that the President or John Ehrlichman might be expected to be aware of them."

"I know this is rushing you, but I need the information by the close of business, Thursday, September 7, 1972."

Erickson did not return a reporter's calls about the matter, but Hushen said an aide to the Deputy Attorney General had acted on the White House request without consulting Erickson in advance.

Rather than polling United States attorneys around the country, which Hushen described as the appropriate action, the aide sent it on to the FBI.

Only a few words differed between the version of the directive released by the White House and the one attributed to Gray by Time magazine.

Hushen declined to identify the Erickson aide held responsible. He said that Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst has received a "full report" on the incident and will decide on appropriate disciplinary action.

Ehrlichman, talking to reporters at the White House, made no attempt to conceal his own irritation over the FBI's involvement, which he said he first learned about during a presidential trip in Ohio on Saturday.

"I am really not aware of this ever being done before," the presidential aide said, "and had I been aware, I certainly would have taken steps to prevent it, because I don't think it is proper."

"It will not be done in the future," he declared.