

# Laird Quits, Urges Speed On Impeachment Question

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19 — Melvin R. Laird resigned today as President Nixon's chief domestic adviser and said that he believed the House of Representatives should vote no later than March 15 on the question of impeaching the President.

"I think a vote would be a healthy thing," Mr. Laird told a news conference in which he announced that he was leaving Government service next month and taking a position with the Reader's Digest Association. His resignation has been expected for some time.

The former Wisconsin Representative said he was convinced that the House would vote against recommending that the Senate try Mr. Nixon for high crimes and misdemeanors. "I am a pretty good vote counter," he added.

## Political Move Implied

Now that the President is turning over to Congress and the courts documents and other information they had sought for months, Mr. Laird said that the House Judiciary Committee, which has the impeachment question under consideration, would have enough time by mid-March to review and evaluate all the evidence.

"I don't think there should be a decision to postpone that vote just to have it closer to the election," Mr. Laird said, implying that Democrats were prepared to delay the vote so as to harm Republican candidates in the 1974 Congressional races.

Mr. Laird's departure, which he delayed until sometime next month at the President's request, was reminiscent of that of John B. Connally earlier this year. While both spoke nice words about the President, they made it clear he had not taken their advice about how to put the Watergate scandals behind him.

Mr. Laird sought to explain today how he urged the President last summer to release the Watergate tapes and other papers, a step that Mr. Nixon took only in recent weeks after his credibility with the public sank and there were widespread demands for his resignation or impeachment.

Mr. Nixon received conflicting recommendations, Mr. Laird said. He said that he had given the President political advice while his attorney had recommended that he claim the right to withhold information under the doctrine of executive privilege and not surrender the tapes to the courts or Congress.

"The President followed the

legal advice," he said. "There is a difference."

Mr. Laird, who was Mr. Nixon's Defense Secretary for four years, also let it be known, in an oblique way, that he differed with Mr. Nixon in another area, press relations.

"I wish to thank you members of the press for the fair treatment I have always received in politics," he said in the White House press room. "To have an adversary relationship with the press is very important. It is very important not to let that become an antagonistic relationship."

The relationship between Mr. Nixon and the press has frequently been described as antagonistic.

Mr. Laird joined the White House staff June 6, to replace John D. Ehrlichman as chief domestic adviser and to help the Administration repair the damage of Watergate.

He said today that at the time a number of Administration bills were stalled in Congress and that he was proud to say that, because of his long service in that body, he had been able to get some of them moving. He named the agriculture, manpower, health, education and other bills and the compromise that ended the American bombing of Cambodia.

## Decision to Depart

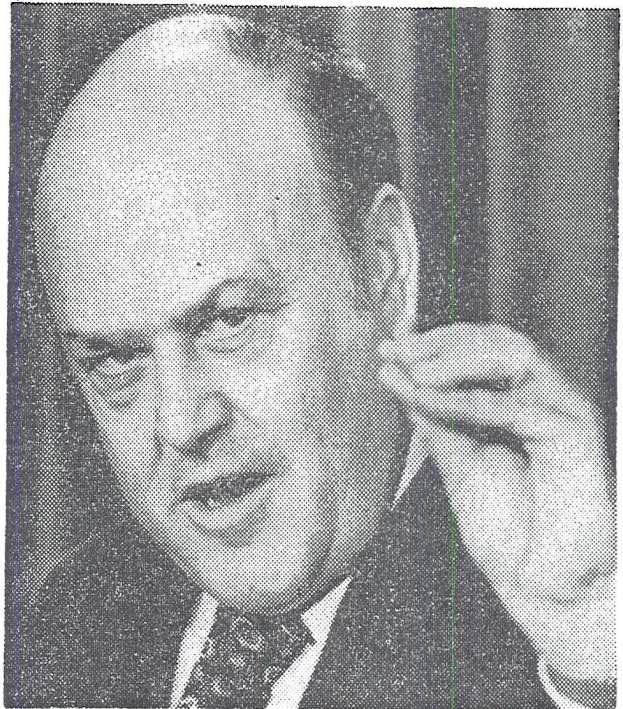
However, shortly after arriving at the White House, Mr. Laird told friends that he felt Mr. Nixon did not enjoy having him around. Mr. Nixon, in the next few months, did not often seek Mr. Laird's counsel, and Mr. Laird decided sometime ago to leave around the first of the year.

In an exchange of letters today, Mr. Nixon said that he accepted the resignation "with deepest personal regret."

"At the same time, I greatly appreciate the fact that you have agreed to postpone your departure for a month until Feb. 1 in order to assist in the work related to next month's State of the Union and budget messages," he said.

Mr. Laird said that he would be senior counselor for national and international affairs of the Reader's Digest Association. He will contribute articles on major domestic and foreign issues, maintain an office in Washington and travel extensively on behalf of the magazine. He declined to disclose his salary.

Another Presidential assistant with broad political experience, Bryce N. Harlow, has confirmed that he, too, is leaving the Administration shortly, saying that he had never intended to stay for more than a few months.



Associated Press

Melvin R. Laird announcing his resignation from President Nixon's staff yesterday at the White House.