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White House Attack on FBI Critics

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The White House accused Senator Edmund S. Muskie and other FBI critics yesterday of a "blatantly political" attempt to sow suspicion and fear among the people by falsely charging the FBI with indiscriminate spying on innocent citizens.

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler singled out Muskie (Dem-Maine), widely regarded as the front-runner for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination as one of those he said are trying to discredit the FBI.

Ziegler, who said he was speaking for the Nixon administration, also challenged Louisiana Representative Hale Boggs, the No. 2 Democrat in the House, to prove his claims that his personal activities and telephone had been under FBI surveillance.

INDICATION

The comments by Ziegler at a White House news briefing were the toughest yet by the Administration in the growing controversy over FBI activities. Coming one day after a formal statement by Attorney General John N. Mitchell, they indicated the Administration might be trying to make the FBI's role a political issue.

Mitchell, vacationing in Key Biscayne, Fla., said Thursday that the FBI's presence at any Earth Day rallies last year was ordered on the basis of information indicating that some of the people participating had been involved in previous violent incidents.

But Muskie, on a two-day swing through New Hampshire to build support for the state's presidential primary next March, rejected Mitchell's explanation and challenged the Attorney General to make a full disclosure of FBI surveillance activities.

"It would be interesting to know if Mitchell relates all these rallies to some criminal activity, some specific threat of violence or some specific threat to national security," Muskie said.

The Maine senator also told a crowd in Manchester,

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N.H., that if he were President, he would "invite" FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to resign.

"There appears to be an attempt to create an attitude, an impression by those officials who are raising this issue that this Administration and the FBI are indiscriminately spying on and conducting surveillance of law-abiding citizens," Ziegler said.

He said their aim was to spread "a feeling of fear and intimidation among the people of this country."

Members of Congress who believe their telephones have

been tapped by the FBI ought to initiate any investigation by looking into the charges made by Boggs, Ziegler said. He noted that Boggs promised to back up his allegations with documentation but that, to date, they remain "wholly unsubstantiated."

RALLIES

As for Muskie's charge that FBI agents kept watch over between 50 and 60 Earth Day assemblies last spring, Ziegler said it could be "so clearly placed in the political category" that nothing would be gained from an investigation.

Ziegler also said that al-

though the FBI has some specific responsibilities related to national security, it did not conduct indiscriminate surveillance of private citizens and that Nixon administration policy did not sanction the tapping of telephones used by members of Congress.

Questioned about a New York Times report yesterday that the FBI sent an informer into the office of Representative John Dowdy (Dem-Tex.) any information would have to come from the Justice Department.

The department later defended its use of the informer, saying this is a "traditional practice in criminal investigations."

TAPPING

Assistant Attorney General William H. Rehnquist, of the office of legal counsel, said in a brief statement that nothing about the Dowdy case was contrary in any way to the statements of Justice Department officials that "the FBI has not tapped the telephone of any member of the House or Senate, now or in the past."

Dowdy was indicted March 31, 1970, on charges he accepted a \$25,000 bribe.

"The right of one party to a conversation to record what he hears without the knowledge of the other has been upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States as recently as two weeks ago," Rehnquist said.

"This traditional practice in criminal investigators is not wiretapping in any sense."