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White House: No Comment

White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler declined in a number of different ways yesterday to be drawn into comment on yesterday's Washington Post story alleging White House attempts to sabotage the Democratic campaign.

The Post reported, among other things, that Ken W. Clawson, deputy director of White House communications, had told a Post reporter that he had fabricated a letter to the editor of a Manchester, N.H., newspaper. The letter was considered damaging to Muskie's campaign.

Following are excerpts of Ziegler's regular 11 a.m. briefing for the White House press corps yesterday:

Q: Did the President's investigation of the problem surrounding the Watergate turn up the fact that some of people on his staff had been engaging in political sabotage?

Ziegler: You state as a fact a story that was written, but later denied by the re-election committee.

Q: I am not stating anything as a fact. I am asking if the President's investigation that he said he ordered did turn up evidence of political sabotage.

Ziegler: He has made several points in the past regarding the Dean investigation. I have nothing more to add to that . . .

Q: Ron, in his comments on John Dean's investigation, the President never did touch on the political espionage or sabotage thing that was raised by Bob's question. Can you go into that at all, that aspect? The question was: Did John Dean's investigation turn up any of this?

Ziegler: I don't have any further comment on the subject . . .

Q: The President has no comment on the story?

Ziegler: I just suggest you address your questions to the re-elect committee, as people have already done.

Q: The re-elect committee, as you have said so many times in the past, does not have the direct contact with the White House that Mr. Klein's staff has. As I understand it, we are talking about a man who works for the President in the Executive Office Building.

Ziegler: He has already issued a statement on that, and I have nothing to add to it . . .

Q: Sen. McGovern has made the point time and time again in his speeches that if this happened within his election campaign, he would be held personally accountable for that. Is the President not personally accountable for things that happen within the re-election committee?

Ziegler: I just have nothing further to say on this story . . .

Q: Do you mean that the President will have nothing to say about the specter of a person working in the White House implicated in that kind of story?

Ziegler: I have nothing further to say to you about the story that ran. I have already referred you to the comments that were included in the story as published . . .

Q: May we film you denying these stories or saying you have nothing further to add to this?

Ziegler: No. We are under normal White House briefing rules.

Q: Is the Dean report in writing?

Ziegler: I quite frankly cannot tell you. I have not seen the Dean report myself, personally.

Q: At the press conference before last in San Clemente the President said that the Dean report has shown that no one presently employed in his administration had figured in the Watergate case. Mr. Clawson, who is presently employed in the administration, has now

been named and prior to that Mr. Timmons was named by one of the participants in the case in the reports on the bugging in the Watergate. Does the President stand by his statement that no one presently employed was involved in the case?

Ziegler: In the Watergate case, yes.

Q: You are leaving open the possibility that the Dean investigation did turn up political sabotage.

Ziegler: I am not leaving anything open. I am just telling you I have no further statement or comments or information to provide you on the story that ran in The Washington Post this morning . . .

Q: Did the Dean report go into the name or activity or lack of activity of Mr. Clawson or Mr. Timmons?

Ziegler: I have not had a report of the entirety of the Dean report, so I am unable to answer that . . .

Q: As a result of The Washington Post story, has the President asked anyone in the White House, at the committee or the FBI for any further information of any kind?

Ziegler: I would say that

the information available to the President is complete, which led him to his previous statements.

Q: Has anyone in the White House, since publication of the story in The Washington Post, Mr. Dean or otherwise, talked to Mr. Clawson to find out whether this story is true or not, whether he did this or did not do this?

Ziegler: I would just conclude this by saying, giving you my final comment on the subject, that Mr. Clawson has already issued a statement on the subject.

Q: That is not my question. I wondered whether anybody at the White House checked with him.

Ziegler: The matter was denied by Mr. Clawson and that stands on the record.

Q: Is that a White House denial?

Ziegler: It is a denial by the individual involved.

Q: Is it a denial by the White House?

Ziegler: It is a denial by Mr. Clawson and one with which I do not disassociate myself . . .

Q: Does the President still have confidence in Ken Clawson?

Ziegler: Yes.