

Report

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House accused the Washington Post today of engaging in "character assassination" and "a vicious abuse of the journalistic process" in reporting on alleged political sabotage by the Republican party.

Press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler was specifically critical of the lead story in Wednesday editions of the Post. The story quoted unnamed sources as saying H.R. Haldeman, President Nixon's chief of staff, was linked to a "secret fund" that the newspaper has said was used for espionage and sabotage efforts.

Democratic presidential nominee Sen. George McGovern said earlier today that the Post report of Haldeman's alleged involvement in sabotage and espionage "places the whole ugly mess . . . right squarely in the lap of Richard Nixon."

THE PRESIDENTIAL spokesman denied Haldeman was connected with any secret fund.

Ziegler emphasized he was talking to newsmen "as a spokesman for the White House."

"This is a political effort by the Washington Post, well conceived and coordinated with the aim of discrediting this administration," said Ziegler.

In what was the most strongly worded White House blast against any publication in recent memory, Ziegler said of Post accounts of the alleged sabotage plot:

"THIS IS a vicious abuse of the journalistic process. It is political and...a blatant effort at character assassination."

He accused the Post of "building hearsay upon hearsay" and in subsequent editions, turning rumor into fact on its editorial page.

Ziegler also volunteered that Nixon's Democratic opponent, Sen. George McGovern, had commented earlier in the day on the Post report concerning Haldeman.

"It's a pattern that is being followed," said the Nixon spokesman.

Paper Reports on Alleged GOP Sabotage

of GOP Sabotage Fund 'Vicious' Journalism, Ziegler Says

newspaper's executive editor, Benjamin C. Bradlee, "is not a supporter of President Nixon."

Apart from denying that Haldeman had any connection with a secret fund, Ziegler insisted he has been informed that no such secret fund ever existed.

General Accounting Office investigators have reported that, earlier in the year, the Nixon campaign organization maintained a cash fund of amounts up to \$700,000 that was kept in a safe in the office of former Secretary of Commerce Maurice Stans, now finance chairman of the Nixon re-election campaign.

Asked to give the source of his statement that no secret fund existed, Ziegler said he had been so informed by John Dean III, White House special counsel who conducted an internal investigation for Nixon following the arrest of GOP operatives in the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

The Post said it had been told that Hugh W. Sloan Jr., former treasurer of the Nixon campaign, told a federal grand jury Haldeman was one of five men authorized to approve payments from the reported cash fund.

THE POST has not endorsed a presidential candidate.

Ziegler noted that the White House had denied this prior to publication of the Post's story and added that, earlier today, Sloan's attorney stated his client gave no such testimony.

Ziegler was particularly critical of the fact that this and a number of other recent Post stories on the subject have not identified the newspaper's sources. He said:

"I personally feel this is shabby journalism... this effort on the part of the Post is getting to the point of absurdity."

Asked if the White House was continuing its subscription to the Post, Ziegler replied, "We have to—out of self-protection."

THE PRESS secretary said

man but declared, "I haven't quite frankly discussed this with the President." However, Ziegler added he was talking as a White House spokesman from a White House rostrum.

Ziegler said he was intrigued by the placement, timing and content of a number of Post articles on the general subject.

"I feel an obligation to call their hand on this," he said.

McGovern told a labor

group in Milwaukee earlier today that the Post report should be alarming to all Americans.

"... That issue alone is enough to retire Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew from the White House," he said.

McGOVERN, QUOTING the Post, said the accounts "of

of Richard Nixon," McGovern said.

"Haldeman is the most powerful man in the White House next to the President himself," McGovern said. "He's the chief of staff and no other American is so close to Richard Nixon as H. R. Haldeman."

"And I say that every

fronts us in this country today," he said. "If the American people will think about what that means, that issue alone is enough to retire Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew from the White House."

That drew a round of applause from the union men and women who crowded a motel dining room to hear

political espionage, of political sabotage, of corruption of all kinds of our political process, now traces right back to H. R. Haldeman in the White House.

"Now," McGovern said, "this places the whole ugly mess of corruption, of espionage, of sabotage, of wiretapping, right squarely in the lap

American, whether he's a Republican, a Democrat or an independent ought to be alarmed when the perversion of our political process... is traced right into the White House to the top man who sits day after day at the President's right hand."

"THAT'S the crisis that con-

McGovern.

McGovern said some political writers tell him this is an issue that doesn't concern the American people.

"I don't believe that," McGovern said.

The Post said Haldeman was one of five close Nixon associates who controlled a secret campaign spying and sabotage fund.

The Post said it based the report on information from federal investigators and accounts of sworn testimony given to a grand jury investigating the June 17 break-in at Democratic national headquarters in the Watergate building.