

NIXON REPORTS 'MAJOR' FINDINGS IN WATERGATE INQUIRY HE MADE; NEW INDICTMENTS ARE EXPECTED

IMMUNITY BARRED

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President to Let White House Aides Testify Before Senators

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WASHINGTON, April 17—

President Nixon announced today that "major developments" had come to light in the Watergate case as a result of a new investigation that he himself had conducted.

Appearing before a hurriedly summoned gathering of the White House press corps, Mr. Nixon read two announcements promising limited testimony from his aides before a Senate investigating committee and asserting that "real progress" had been made in getting to the bottom of the case.

The President, who answered no questions, took the unusual step of raising the prospect of indictments. He said he would suspend any Government employe indicted in connection with the Watergate episode and discharge immediately anyone who was convicted.

No Immunity

"No individual holding, in the past or at present, a position of major importance in the Administration should be given immunity from prosecution," he said. "I condemn any attempt to cover up in this case, no matter who is involved."

A few moments after the President's dramatic appearance, Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, declared that Mr. Nixon's past statements denying any involvement by White House staff members were now "inoperative."

Early tonight, Government sources said that further indictments would be issued within a week. But Earl J. Silbert, the principal United States Attorney prosecuting the case, declined to comment.

No Comment on Dean

Mr. Ziegler specifically refused to repeat his comment of March 24 in which he said that the President retained full con-

fidence in his counsel, John W. Dean 3d.

Mr. Dean had conducted an investigation on the basis of which the President asserted at a news conference last Aug. 29 that he could "say categorically that no one in the White House staff, no one in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

Mr. Nixon and his spokesmen had clung to that position through the 1972 electoral campaign, through thousands of newspaper and television reports questioning it and through increasingly critical comments by officeholders of both parties—until the President, calm and somber, appeared in the west wing press room this afternoon with his statements.

Dean Not in Inquiry

Mr. Nixon indicated, and the White House subsequently confirmed, that Mr. Dean had been involved neither in negotiations with the Senate Watergate committee, headed by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, nor in the investigation that led to the major new development of which the President spoke.

That, together with Mr. Nixon's refusal to reiterate Presidential support for the counsel, led White House sources to speculate that the grand jury's

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attention might be centering on him.

Administration sources said it did not appear that H. R. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, who is usually considered Mr. Nixon's most important aide, was involved in the new developments.

Mr. Haldeman is not known to have testified before the grand jury. Among those have done so are Mr. Dean, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, Jeb S. Magruder, Dwight L. Chapin and Gordon C. Strachan—all of whom worked at the White House or at the Committee for the reelection of the president at the time of the Watergate burglary.

Retreat From March

The President, who said at a news conference on March 15 that no member of his staff would be permitted to testify before Senator Ervin's com-

mittee, retreated somewhat from that posture today.

In March, he said flatly, "Members of the White House still will not appear before a committee of Congress in any formal session." Today, however, he said "all members of the White House staff will appear voluntarily"—but under certain restrictions.

As indicated by the President, the committee meetings will be formal, but they may be "in the first instance" in executive session—that is, in secret—"if appropriate." Further, as he stated things, staff members may reassert executive privilege "as to any question" during the meetings.

Thus it appeared that if there were any conflict it would come when specific questions that the White House did not wish to answer were asked.

Mr. Nixon said that he thought an agreement had been reached which was satisfactory to him and to the committee because it contained "ground rules which would preserve the separation of powers without suppressing the facts."

However, there were ambiguities in the President's statement. He said that witnesses might appear in executive session "in the first instance"—but he did not say that testimony would then be repeated in open session, or who would decide whether it could.

He also said that staff members "will answer fully all proper questions"—but he did not reconcile that with the reserved right to executive privilege, nor did he say who would decide which questions "were proper and which not."

Furthermore, a spokesman for Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., the Connecticut Republican who has sharply criticized Mr. Nixon's handling of the Watergate episode, said the President's statement was in accord only with an initial set of guidelines approved by the committee yesterday.

Later, the spokesman said, the guidelines were revised to exclude the possibility of executive privilege. The spokesman asserted that Mr. Weicker would not accept executive sessions. He is a member of the committee.

Neither Mr. Ervin nor Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the committee's ranking Republican, was immediately available for clarification.

Intensive New Inquiries

Mr. Nixon said at the outset of his second statement—the one that dealt with the possibility of indictments—that he had begun "intensive new inquiries" into the Watergate case on March 21 as the result of "serious charges which came

to my attention, some of which were publicly reported."

Mr. Ziegler gave no specific information as to what charges the President referred to, but he suggested that Mr. Nixon might have been talking about disclosures made by James W. McCord Jr.

McCord, one of those convicted in the break-in at the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in the Watergate building on June 17—exactly 10 months ago today—wrote on March 19 a letter to Federal Judge John J. Sirica, who had presided over the trial of the Watergate conspirators.

McCord said in the letter, which was delivered on March 21 and made public two days later, that he had additional information on the case. He has since given testimony, much of it based on hearsay, to both the grand jury and the special Senate committee.

His charges have led to a revival of interest in the case.

Congressional sources reported, however, that Mr. Nixon had swung into action after L. Patrick Gray 3d, who was at that time the President's nominee for director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, testified on March 22 before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Mr. Gray said on that day that Mr. Dean, the White House counsel, had "probably" lied to F.B.I. agents investigating the case. Two weeks later, Mr. Nixon withdrew the nomination of Mr. Gray.

The President, Mr. Ziegler said today, had taken personal command of the new investigation. He said that Henry E. Petersen, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division, had carried out much of the inquiry along with several of his associates.

At about the same time, two White House staff members who have never been accused of involvement with the Watergate case, John D. Ehrlichman and Leonard Garment, began negotiations with Senators Ervin and Baker and their aides.

According to a senior White House official, strategy meetings, in which Mr. Haldeman was involved, were held last Thursday and Friday. On Saturday, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who for a time managed Mr. Nixon's 1972 campaign, paid an unannounced visit to the White House.

Tells of Michell Talk

After three days of White House silence—including a news briefing this morning when Gerald L. Warren, the deputy press secretary, turned aside about 50 Watergate questions from angry reporters—Mr. Ziegler disclosed tonight that Mr. Mitchell had come to talk with Mr. Ehrlichman.

Finally, on Sunday afternoon, in another unannounced meeting, Mr. Nixon conferred in his hideaway office in the Execu-

Mr. Dean did not attend the meetings. This afternoon, reporters were called back to the White House. An hour and a half later, at 4:37 P.M., Mr. Nixon walked into the press room, dressed in a blue suit, a sheaf of typescript in hand, and read it. It took eight minutes.

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Associated Press

President Nixon talking to reporters at the White House yesterday about Watergate case

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