

Nixon's Own Watergate Probe -- 'Major' Findings

President Says His Aides Will Testify in Senate --Indictments Hinted

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Washington

President Nixon announced yesterday 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, Mrs. 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 employee indicted in connection with the Watergate episode and discharge immediately anyone who was convicted.

"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, White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler said that Mr. Nixon's past statements denying any involvement by White House staff members are now "inoperative."

Early last evening, government sources said that further indictments would be issued within a week. But

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til the president, calm and somber, appeared in the West Wing press room yesterday afternoon with his statements.

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

That, together with Ziegler's refusal to reiterate presidential support for the counsel, led White House sources to speculate that the grand jury's attention might be centering on him.

Congressional sources re-

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ported that Mr. Nixon had swung into action after L. Patrick Gray III, who was at that time the President's nominee for director of the FBI, testified on March 22 before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Gray said on that day that Dean had "probably" lied to FBI agents investigating the case.

The President, Ziegler said yesterday, had taken personal command of the new investigation. He said that Henry Peterson, assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division had carried out much of the inquiry along with several of his associates.

Earl J. Silbert, the principal United States attorney prosecuting the case, declined to comment.

REFUSED

Ziegler specifically refused to repeat his comment of March 24 in which he said that the President retained full confidence in his counsel, John W. Dean III.

Dean had conducted the investigation on the basis of which the President asserted at a new conference last August 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 office holders of both parties — un-

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

The President, who said at a news conference on March 15 that no member of his staff would be permitted to testify before Ervin's committee, retreated somewhat from that position yesterday.

In March, he said flatly that "members of the White House still will not appear before a committee of Congress in any formal session." Yesterday, however, Mr. Nixon 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 public and formal, but they may move to in executive session — that is, in secret — "if appropriate." Further, as the President 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 which 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."