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Nixon Warned of Those Around Him

By RAY CROMLEY

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For the past two years, President Nixon has been quietly but vigorously warned by close friends and associates about key figures in his intimate White House hierarchy.

It is known that former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, Secretary of State William Rogers, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, Republican party bigwigs Rogers Morton and Bob Wilson, New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, former Treasury Secretary John Connally, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary George Romney and former Interior Secretary Walter Hickel at one time or another, directly or indirectly, personally told or sent word to Mr. Nixon that he had surrounded himself with men they did not trust and whose judgment they feared.

This is not to suggest that any of the old Nixon friends or others of the protesting group mentioned above knew about Watergate in advance. To the best of this reporter's knowledge they did not. It was rather that these experienced men had serious reservations of their own about a goodly section of the Nixon palace guard.

Some only questioned the intelligence of these shadowy figures in positions of power in the Nixon inner circle. One high-placed member of the Cabinet is known to have told Mr. Nixon personally that these were "stupid" men who would get him in trouble by hairbrained advice. Others in the group mentioned above mistrusted strongly the great personal desire for power of members of the several White House cliques and the methods they used to achieve that power.

Melvin Laird is known to have been one of the strongest objectors over the past several years. Men close to the former secretary of Defense have told this reporter Laird absolutely "despised" some of the top men closest to the President.

Sources have said privately that unlike former Interior Secretary Hickel, who sent a personal letter of protest to Mr. Nixon in his frustration at being unable to confer with the President—being blocked by the inner White House circle—Laird would brush even top "doorkeepers" aside and walk in for direct face-to-face talks with the chief himself.

On the seventh floor of the State Department, Laird is known as one man in this town not awed by either H. R. Haldeman or John D. Ehrlichman and certainly not by young John Dean.

This helps to explain Mr. Nixon's recent urgent plea to Laird to "come home" and clean out the White House staff. Why Laird rejected that plea is not yet certain. Friends say he did not feel the time was ripe—that the President was not yet ready emotionally to give anyone the full powers a man would need to clean house adequately. The old White House group had given him a screen of "security" for too long.

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