

Talk of Haldeman Influence Persists Despite New Denials

By Lou Cannon

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In the seven months since H. R. Haldeman stepped down as White House chief of staff, there have been persistent reports that he continues to exercise a shadow influence in the highest counsels of the Nixon administration. White House spokesmen have always denied that Haldeman remains a figure of influence.

Yesterday the question came up again in the wake of testimony by Haldeman's former aide, Lawrence M. Higby, that Haldeman possessed enough authority in mid-November to order him to find a

document in the files Haldeman had left behind.

White House deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren denied once again yesterday that Haldeman has any authority within the White House. But Warren conceded, for the first time, that the President had talked with Haldeman over the telephone and that Haldeman also held telephone conversations "three or four times, maybe five" with White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, who has become one of Mr. Nixon's closest aides.

Another high-ranking White House official said the Presi-

dent has held "several conversations" with Haldeman since he left the White House and still respects his advice. Warren said the two men have talked "very rarely," but he rejected a request by reporters to ask the date of their last conversation or to find out how frequently they have talked together.

Warren did say that "no one in the White House is receiving instructions from Mr. Haldeman" about Watergate or other issues. He declined, however, to comment on the Higby testimony on grounds the case is in court.

See PRESIDENT, A6, Col. 2

PRESIDENT, From A1

Later in the day, the man who replaced Haldeman told U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica that Haldeman last May had changed the combination on the lock on his files. Alexander M. Haig Jr. testified that he had telephoned Haldeman on Nov. 15 to get the combination.

Haldeman called Higby and gave him the combination. He also instructed Higby not to give any of the file's contents to Haig without first reporting back to Haldeman with a summary of what Haig wanted.

Haig said he did not obtain the combination himself until a subsequent telephone call.

The renewed reports of

Haldeman's continuing influence came as the White House continued attempts to assemble a new legal team that reportedly will coordinate a response to impeachment activities against President Nixon.

The Philadelphia Bulletin reported that Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter soon will join the Watergate defense team and possibly will head it.

Warren conceded that conversations with Specter are being held but said that no decision had been reached. In Philadelphia, Specter, who has lost a re-election bid, said only that he soon will enter private practice and declined to say whether the President will be one of his clients.



ARLEN SPECTER

... may join Nixon team

The prospect of Specter's appointment apparently has touched off a behind-the-scenes battle within the White House. Haig reportedly is skeptical about Specter's ability to head the Nixon defense, as is Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania.

Scott's support is vital for the President, particularly if an impeachment resolution reaches the Senate.

Among the objections to Specter is his lack of personal courtroom experience. He has tried only a handful of cases himself, and there is a feeling by his critics that a more experienced courtroom attorney should head the defense.

One source said it was possible that Specter would become a member of the Nixon legal team but would not actually head it.

President Nixon, meanwhile, scheduled a mid-December

physical examination at Bethesda Naval Medical Center.

In an interview with the Associated Press, the President's physician, Dr. Walter Tkach, said Mr. Nixon was "well—except at times I think he's tired."

Tkach said the 60-year-old President had no health problems whatsoever.

In the interview Tkach said his one complaint was that the President doesn't get enough exercise. He said this problem will be aggravated by the energy shortage because Mr. Nixon will not be able to walk or swim as much in Washington as he can in San Clemente or Key Biscayne.

Asked why he couldn't walk on the White House grounds, Tkach said it was preferable for the President to do his walking "where no one's going to be watching him."