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# White House Story of 'Evidence'

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More than a month ago, according to reporters in the White House press corps, administration aides began calling some key news organizations with what appeared to be an important Watergate story.

The message the reporters said they received was that the White House had evidence that would exonerate President Nixon and show that John Dean lied before the Senate Watergate committee. They could use the story, the reporters said they were told, if they attributed it to an unidentified source.

Thus began what appears to be a campaign — denied by the White House — to plant a story against Dean and in favor of Mr. Nixon that has culminated in the recent announcements by Vice President Gerald Ford and Senate Minority leader Hugh Scott that they have seen — but not necessarily read — material that would be of great help to the president.

White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler denied in a telephone interview that White House aides had made such calls to the press or that there was an attempt to

spread the story about the alleged evidence among newsmen.

According to the newsmen, the White House callers, including in one case presidential speechwriter Patrick Buchanan, declined to produce any evidence for the reporters to examine. These newsmen thus refused to print an unsubstantiated story.

One of those who said he was approached was Clark Mollenhoff of the Des Moines Register, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and former aide to Mr. Nixon. Mollenhoff said that "over a period of several months" various White House aides had told him that "we know for sure there is a perjury case against Dean."

"They were trying to get me to write this self-serving declaration based on an anonymous White House source," he said. "It was something I just didn't buy."

Mollenhoff said he asked one White House aide who approached him whether the aide had actually seen the evidence. He said the aide replied that he had not but had been told it existed "on the best authority possible."

Over the weekend, the public first got news that such evidence might exist when Scott went on CBS' "Face the Nation." He said

he had "some information" that seemed to "exculpate the President" but that he could not get the White House to release it to the press.

Vice President Ford followed up on Tuesday when he told a press conference that the White House had information that would clear Mr. Nixon. Neither said they had actually read the material, and if such evidence exists it has still not been made public.

The New York Times and the Chicago Tribune also were approached by White House emissaries in recent weeks, according to sources at both papers. The Times source said Buchanan called a reporter about a month ago and said he had transcripts of some tapes that would show Dean was lying. "We asked to see the transcripts," the Times man said, and he left it up in the air. The Times did not print a story.

Buchanan could not be reached for comment.

Chicago Tribune reporters heard in December of the possibility that such evidence might exist and tried without success to obtain it.

"We found any number of White House officials who were willing to say it existed," said Jim Squires of the Tribune's Washington bureau. But when the paper asked to see the evidence it was refused.