

'I Know What I Meant'

Washington

President Nixon insisted last night that he did not authorize the payment of hush money or the granting of clemency to Watergate defendants at a White House meeting March 21.

Mr. Nixon acknowledged, however, that the tape recording of the discussion might be subject to different interpretation.

But he added:

"What I say is that I know what I said, I know what I meant, I know what I did, and I think that any fair minded person will reach the same conclusion that I have repeated here several times tonight."

He said that his own words at the March 21 meeting, and presumably still on the tape, were "it is wrong, that's for sure."

Mr. Nixon discussed the March 21 meeting with former White House aides John W. Dean III and H.R. Haldeman during a 35-minute nationally televised news conference from the East Room of the White House, the second in nine days.

The March 21 meeting is crucial to the Watergate investigation because the grand jury that returned indictments against seven former Nixon aides last Friday focused on it. The grand jury brought a perjury charge against Haldeman and raised the implication that Mr. Nixon may have approved the payment of hush money.

In the indictment, the grand jury quoted Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, as telling the Senate Watergate committee that Mr. Nixon had said it would be wrong to raise \$1 million to insure the silence of the Watergate burglars. The indictment charged that Haldeman had knowingly lied in asserting

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that Mr. Nixon had said "it would be wrong" to raise hush money.

Last night, Mr. Nixon repeated the explanation of the meeting that he had made last August in a news conference. If money were raised for the defendants, he said, they would then want executive clemency and that could not be done.

"I then said that to pay clemency was wrong," he said last night. "In fact, I think I can quote it directly. I said it is wrong, that's for sure. Mr. Haldeman was present when I said that. Mr. Dean was present. Both agreed with my conclusion."

"Now, when individuals read the entire transcript of the 21st meeting, or hear the entire tape where we discussed all these options, they may reach different interpretations. But I know what I meant, and I know, also, what I did."

He then said he meant the whole transaction was wrong.

In answer to questions on matters not involving the Watergate scandal, the President made the following points:

- He predicted that there would be no recession this year and that, with food and fuel prices in check by the middle of year, the economy would begin to take "an upward turn."

- He disputed the contention that Republican defeats in recent mid-term congressional elections indicated that Republicans would suffer badly in the regular 1976 elections. He said that he thought American efforts would lead to a lifting of the Arab oil embargo but he declined to make a flat prediction for fear that it might lead the Arabs to do otherwise.

- He disclosed that he



A newsmen held up a 'Mr. President' sign trying to get Nixon's attention during the press conference

AP Wirephoto

would submit legislation to limit on all contributions to Congress asking for limits on private campaign contributions.

Concerning inflation, Mr. Nixon said it was caused by two major factors — in-crease energy costs and rising food prices.

By the middle of year, he said, energy prices will "be kept in check and, we trust, even moving downward." A record food crop should also "bring the price upsurge in food under control," he added.

Mr. Nixon said his proposals for campaign reform would set a \$50 limit on cash contributions to candidates for President and a \$3000

limit on all contributions of candidates to presidential candidates.

He declined to endorse public financing on the ground that the proposals House employee would be "highly improper," despite the practice of prosecutors to use such grants to obtain evidence against other potential criminal defendants.

The President said none of his former key aides had pleaded a Fifth Amendment right to refuse to answer questions or bargain with prosecutors for leniency in exchange for testimony. He said his former associates had been convicted only in the news media.

The former aides are apparently convinced of their

innocence and a court of law will ultimately decide the facts, Mr. Nixon said.

Mr. Nixon was asked why he did not turn over all information to the authorities after his March 21 meeting with Dean, he said that the "option of a full disclosure at that time" was considered but that he had not been informed about payments to defendants and the "alleged coverup" until that date and that he thought it was incumbent for him first to conduct his own investigation.

It was always his goal, Nixon insisted, to have a full disclosure of all the facts, Mr. Nixon insisted.

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