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Notes Shunned At White House

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Some White House aides have been reluctant to make notes of their conversations with President Nixon because of fear that they may be made public in a future investigation, press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said yesterday.

There has been a "hesitancy" on the part of some staff members and others "to make extensive notes or to put things down on paper," Ziegler said in answer to questions.

He said he did not believe that aides withheld frank advice, but he said that if they think they will be subject to a call to testify on their conversations with the President "it would inhibit their activity."

While insisting that the problem has not yet affected the decision-making process, Ziegler said that if there is a "complete erosion" of executive privilege or the principle of separation of powers "it could become a very serious problem" for this and future administrations.

The President has been aware of the problem of premature disclosure in his resistance to making documents public, Ziegler emphasized.

The press secretary, in one of his rare meetings with reporters, was asked whether publication of the tape transcripts had embarrassed him personally.

The reporter said the transcripts demonstrated that Ziegler last year misled reporters.

Ziegler merely replied that he had not "come out here with the overt attempt to state things that I felt were not as they were."

The transcripts in several instances disclose that the President instructed Ziegler to "stall them off today" or "just get out there and act like your usual cocky, confident self."

At one point, when Ziegler asked the President how he should respond to a question,

as to whether presidential counsel John W. Dean III would appear before a grand jury, the President replied, "That's tough."

Ziegler volunteered: "I could—two options: One would be to say that (unintelligible); the other would be say the (unintelligible)."

Asked about a report from Cairo that Mr. Nixon plans to visit the Middle East in June, Ziegler would say only that there are no specific plans but that he did not want to rule out any possibilities.

When asked if Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had been invited to the United States, Ziegler also left that door open by saying Sadat would be welcome but that no definite plans had been made.

Ziegler said the President still intends to hold a summit meeting in Moscow in late June even if the impeachment inquiry is at a critical stage.

The White House has not taken a firm stand on whether the House Judiciary Committee should grant immunity to witnesses, Ziegler said. He added that James D. St. Clair, the President's counsel, sees "no real problem in the granting of immunity, but we have not explored this in substantial detail."

Mr. Nixon spent most of the day secluded in his Executive Office Building office. He went to his Oval Office at noon for a brief meeting with Secretary of Labor Peter J. Brennan.

Asked whether he had read the Watergate transcripts, Brennan said he had read part of them and concluded that "they don't incriminate the President in any crimes—I don't see any felonies there."

Brennan said the rank-and-file of working people "are not yelling for impeachment." They are talking about "bread-and-butter issues," he said.