

President Is 'Up to Battle,' Will Fight, Ziegler Says

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WASHINGTON, May 10—Speculation swept across official Washington today that President Nixon was on the verge of announcing his resignation. The White House denied it, more than once, and lawyers defending the President against the possibility of impeachment by the House of Representatives dismissed it as "ridiculous."

Ronald L. Ziegler, the President's press secretary, telephoned The New York Times tonight with the following statement:

"The city of Washington is full of rumors. All that have been presented to me today are false, and the one that heads the list is the one that says President Nixon intends to resign.

"His attitude is one of determination that he will not be driven out of office by rumor, speculation, excessive charges or hypocrisy. He is up to the battle, he intends to fight it, and he feels he has a personal and constitutional responsibility to do so."

New Rumors Spring Up

As the day went on, each denial appeared to give rise to a new rumor. The capital was consumed with an almost morbid air of anticipation.

New rumors were spawned, for instance, by a long White House meeting involving Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., the chief of staff; Mr. Ziegler, William E. Timmons, the assistant for legislative affairs, and Richard A. Moore, a key adviser on the use of the media by Mr. Nixon. Competent sources said, later, however, that the topic of the meeting was how to deal with all the resignation rumors.

An aide to an influential Republican Senator, an official not normally given to idle gossip, stated flatly that he under-

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stood from a senior Administration official that Mr. Nixon would leave office "within 48 hours."

Another Congressional official said privately that he had authoritative information that an "extraordinary" development would occur within 24 hours. He speculated that it related to negotiations between

the White House and the Watergate special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, toward some arrangement that would enable Mr. Nixon to leave office without facing prosecution in the Watergate and related cases.

A Cabinet official told an interviewer that a Cabinet meeting scheduled for this morning had been canceled abruptly last night. The same official said Mr. Nixon was "under a terrible strain and he doesn't look well."

But the President went on a cruise of the Potomac River aboard the White House yacht Sequoia.

General Haig told The Associated Press in an interview that he tried to steer clear of categorical statements, but he added:

"I think the only thing that would tempt resignation on the part of the President would be if he thought that served the best interests of the American people. At this juncture, I don't see anything on the horizon which would meet that criterion. Admittedly, that's a subjective view on my part, and I think it is one the President shares very strenuously."

President Nixon has repeatedly asserted his intention to serve out his second term, but as a number of people recalled today, so did Vice President Agnew 10 days before he resigned last October.

Gerald L. Warren, the White House deputy press secretary, said that the President was aware of mounting talk about resignation among Republicans and in newspapers that had been staunchly loyal to him. But Mr. Warren said there was no consideration being given to a Presidential abdication.

A source close to the Watergate special prosecution task force also said that nothing was imminent there that might cause or enhance a Presidential resignation.

Under Pressure

There was no doubt that pressure on Mr. Nixon to step down was growing among some of his former supporters. A former White House aide said such a decision by the President was "premature." A high-level State Department official described the situation as "deteriorating rapidly." And a White House loyalist in the Republican Congressional hierarchy reported "a lot of erosion" in Mr. Nixon's standing.

Three factors appeared to be

behind the atmosphere of impending Presidential denouement.

The first was the beginning yesterday, behind the closed doors of the House Judiciary Committee, of the formal impeachment hearings that will ultimately provide the basis for judging Mr. Nixon's fitness to serve out his second term in office.

Although the evidence presented at the first session dealt

largely with the background of the events that led up to the party's offices in the Watergate complex in June, 1972, and did not directly involve the President, the presentation was said by one participant to have been so "methodical" and thorough as to give pause to the President's supporters on the panel.

One committee member said that James D. St. Clair, the President's chief defense lawyer, who attended the closed briefing, "had to receive a message from this" that later, and more crucial, stages of the methodical.

A second factor involved an hour-long private meeting this morning among lawyers for the President, for the Watergate prosecution force and for defendants in the forthcoming Watergate cover-up conspiracy trial. Judge John J. Sirica of the United States District Court, in whose chambers the lawyers met, clamped a strict gag rule on the proceedings, barring any comment on the legal skirmishing over the prosecutor's subpoena of 64 White House tape recordings and the White House move to quash the subpoena. *4 MAY*

Authoritative sources said before the meeting that the subpoena issue could take on a key role in Mr. Nixon's deliberations about his future. The sources said that Mr. Jaworski had told Mr. St. Clair last Saturday that if the President tried to quash the subpoena the prosecutor might be compelled to lay out in court the reasons for seeking the tapes, all but one of them involving Mr. Nixon's own Watergate-related conversations. *6 MAY*

Mr. St. Clair joined Mr. Jaworski last Monday in asking Judge Sirica to delay the court dispute over the subpoena and suggested that some accommodation might be worked out. Late Tuesday, however, after conferring at length with the President, Mr. St. Clair announced that the White House would oppose efforts by both the special prosecutor and the House impeachment inquiry to obtain any more Watergate tapes. *7 MAY*

The third element was the growing discussion among senior Republicans—much of it in public—about their desire that the President give consideration to resignation. Congressional partisans ranking as high as Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Senate Republican leader, and Repre-

sentative John J. Rhodes of Arizona, the House Republican leader, criticized the tone of Mr. Nixon's edited Watergate transcripts; Mr. Scott used the words "shabby" and "immoral."

"A lot of this is people on [Capitol] Hill who want the President to just go away," said a knowledgeable Justice Department official. "People are putting together different ru-

mors to make something out of them that isn't there."

The President's son-in-law and daughter, David and Julie Eisenhower, were expected to debunk the speculation when they hold what was described as a "no holds barred" news conference at noon tomorrow in the east garden of the White House grounds.

All the same, one Congressional aide canceled a weekend trip after being forewarned, he said, that his presence in Washington might be essential. A White House staff member wondered aloud if his job would be there by Monday. And the rumors, some of them verging on the bizarre, proliferated. *13 MAY*

One rumor was that Secretary of State Kissinger—the official to whom the President would hand in his resignation—was being summoned to Washington from Middle East peace negotiations. Mr. Kissinger turned out, however, to be preparing to go to bed in Jerusalem, and planning to return home Tuesday, on schedule.

Another story, said to come circuitously from Vice President Ford's chauffeur, was that Mr. Ford had given orders to his staff following a one-hour meeting with the President this morning that the aides were to be on "red alert" during the weekend, presumably to prepare for his accession to the Presidency. In Buffalo, where he was making a speech, Mr. Ford called the account "a lot of nonsense."

And wide circulation was given to a story that the President had made a secret visit to a neurological hospital in Phoenix, Ariz., when he made an appearance there last week. But it developed that Secret Service advance agents had visited the hospital, St. Joseph's, about two weeks ago merely to make standard precautionary arrangements for emergency medical care if some tragedy should befall the President while in Phoenix. *3 MAY*

Finally, a newsman telephoned an official of the House Judiciary Committee to inquire whether the panel would have legislative jurisdiction over the nomination of a successor to Mr. Ford as Vice President. The committee official, apparently bemused, said that the only preoccupation at the moment was the impeachment inquiry. *DENIED BY FORD - NYT 11 MAY, HUNTER*