

Chapin Quits, White House Denies Firing

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By Lou Cannon

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., Jan. 29 — The White House announced today that President Nixon's appointments secretary will be leaving the administration, but denied that his departure had anything to do with political espionage activities.

Presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said that Dwight L. Chapin, 32, would be quitting the White House this spring to accept a "very fine business offer." Ziegler said that neither presidential assistant H. R. Haldeman nor anyone else in the administration had requested Chapin to leave.

"Dwight Chapin was not asked to leave the administration, and any decision to leave is his own," Ziegler said.

The White House press secretary branded as "incorrect, unfounded and untrue" a story in The New York Times which said that Chapin was being forced out because he had been named in newspaper disclosures as the contact man for Donald H. Segretti, a California attorney who said he played a major role in Republican efforts to disrupt Democratic primaries and engage in espionage against Democratic presidential candidates.

On Oct. 15 The Washington Post reported that Chapin act-

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ed as a "contact" in Washington for Segretti's spying activities, according to federal sources and a sworn statement by a California lawyer who was a friend of both Chapin and Segretti.

In addition, the sources said—and numerous telephone calls confirmed—that Segretti had regular contact with former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt Jr. Hunt pleaded guilty earlier this month to all charges against him in the Watergate bugging case.

Time magazine reported—and The Washington Post confirmed—that Segretti was paid about \$35,000 for his spying activities by Herbert W. Kalmbach, President Nixon's personal attorney in California.

Time magazine also later reported that Chapin had acknowledged he hired Segretti. It is known that Chapin told the FBI that he never asked Segretti to do anything illegal.

Even before today's White House announcement, a high White House official in Washington, discussing reports of Chapin's departure, said that "a second grader could see what's happened. Of course it's the Watergate business. We'll never say that . . . Dwight's one of the finest."

The official said Chapin is personally looked on with great favor by President Nixon, but that Chapin "got caught in the middle."

According to the official, there has been "serious talk" about Chapin leaving for several months, and several businessmen close to the White House realized the situation and have offered positions of high pay and great responsibility to Chapin.

The official said that The New York Times report that Chapin is being "forced out" by Haldeman is "too strong." He indicated that it was more



DWIGHT CHAPIN

. . . will leave in spring

a mutual understanding to avoid possible embarrassment. According to the official, Chapin did not want to leave but accepts the "realities" and is now looking on the brighter side.

Just as Haldeman is regarded as the President's alter ego, carrying out the his orders with energy and dispatch, Chapin has been regarded as Haldeman's alter ego.

A brisk, efficient and personable aide, Chapin not only has handled the President appointments schedule under Haldeman's supervision but has carried out such important assignments as the advance work for the Chinese and Russian trips.

One White House aide told a Washington Post reporter last year that Chapin is "a super loyalist" and is "super-dedicated" to the President, believing that he will "go down in history as the greatest living President."

Chapin first worked for Mr. Nixon in the unsuccessful California gubernatorial campaign of 1962, and then went to work for Haldeman at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency.

Chapin declined to accept telephone call from newsmen today.

At the Florida press briefing today, Ziegler dismissed an inquiry about Chapin's relationship with Segretti as "a question from the past" and refused to discuss it. He did say, though, that Chapin's effectiveness at the White House had not been hampered by the publicity surrounding the Watergate affair.

Chapin and Ziegler were college friends at the University of Southern California, and the White House press secretary said he had talked personally with Chapin many times about his plans. Ziegler said Chapin had "received a number of very fine offers from a number of very fine companies" and indicated that this was the motivation for his decision.

"He made the decision to leave because he decided this was the time to move to a business career," Ziegler said.

Ziegler spent several minutes lauding Chapin's "fine contribution to the presidency" and deploring the news account that he was forced to leave. At one point Ziegler interrupted his comments about Chapin to say:

"Some people in this room are looking at each other with a skeptical eye . . . that is very unfortunate."

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