

Nixon Vows Tough Watergate Probe

4/21/73
Cabinet Told

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In his second major effort this week to defend his administration on the Watergate issue, President Nixon yesterday promised his Cabinet that he would conduct an aggressive campaign to get at the truth.

The President himself brought up the Watergate issue, which has badly shaken the Cabinet as well as members of the White House staff. He promised to "get at the bottom" of the charges, one official reported.

"We've had our Cambodias before," the President was quoted as saying, a reference to the way in which he weathered the storm of protest that greeted his decision to invade the Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia in 1970.

Mr. Nixon met with the Cabinet for about two hours before taking off with his family for the Easter weekend in Key Biscayne, Fla.

A White House spokesman said that the Cabinet meeting had been called to discuss the energy problem and the economy. It was learned that the President also reported on the Soviet Union's promise to him to "suspend" its education tax on emigrants.

The President was smiling and apparently confident, one official reported, and he did not appear to be downhearted despite the sensational charges of scandal.

See **PRESIDENT, A7, Col. 4**



Mr. Nixon waves as he and First Lady board plane at Andrews for trip to Florida.

United Press International

Nixon Assures Cabinet On Watergate Probe

PRESIDENT, From A1

that have rocked the administration.

"I came out of there with the conviction that he [the President] wants to get the truth, wants to see the criminal justice system work and work fully," George Bush, chairman of the Republican National Committee, who regularly attends Cabinet meetings, said.

Another official reported that the President said he was determined that a full investigation should go forward. He also reminded the Cabinet, it was said, that he has directed all officials to tell the truth.

Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst replied that he wanted to say something the President could not say for himself, and that was that from the beginning Mr. Nixon had told him he wanted the most thorough investigation.

As evidence that there will be no coverup, Kleindienst reported on the number of hours Justice Department and FBI officials have spent on the case.

Officials said that Mr. Nixon did not attempt to explain why he had waited until this week to speak publicly on the issue and to promise greater cooperation with the Senate committee and the courts. There was no reference, as far as could be learned, to the "major developments in the case" which the President referred to in his public statement Tuesday.

For weeks, there has been grumbling on the part of some members of the White House staff over the handling of the Watergate case. When Sen. Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.) last week said that "it's beginning to be like Teapot Dome. There's a smell to it," some

White House staffers secretly applauded.

They said privately that they could not understand the attitude of the President and his closest advisers. In fact, sharp criticisms have been made by a number of White House aides against chief of staff H.R. (Bob) Haldeman and others for what is regarded as their insensitivity to the moral as well as political issues involved.

Indeed, it is with increasing frequency that staff men are heard to say that the President has been poorly served by his small group of close advisors, and it is known that some Cabinet members have been discomfited by disclosures that have been made.

One official said that Mr. Nixon has been spending a substantial amount of time in the past week or two on the Watergate issue and its implications. He conferred frequently this week with Henry E. Petersen, assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division, who is now in command of the Justice Department's Watergate investigation.

On Monday, Mr. Nixon spent the evening on the Sequoia cruising down the Potomac. His only guest was Secretary of State William P. Rogers, who began his government career as a Senate committee investigator looking into charges of scandal against the Truman administration. The two have been friends since that time.

No one at the White House or State Department will admit that the Nixon-Rogers meeting was for the purpose of discussing Watergate, but observers were quick to speculate that the President wanted to go over the whole matter with one of his oldest associates, a man he has turned to in other crises, before making his public statement Tuesday promising full cooperation with Congress and the courts.

On Wednesday afternoon, the President flew to Camp David for the night, taking

with him his two closest associates on the White House staff, Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman.

The two principal aides, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, who usually accompany the President, did not accompany him to Florida yesterday because they wanted to spend Easter with their families, a White House spokesman said.

The old complaint that the President is isolated and sees too few members of his Cabinet and Congress has been revived as the Watergate crisis has deepened.

The brunt of the criticism is directed at Haldeman and Ehrlichman, who see the President frequently. White House staff members have been heard to charge that Haldeman and Ehrlichman have prevented essential information from reaching the President.

There were sighs of relief among staff aides when the President spoke out Tuesday. While some said that he did not go far enough in clearing the atmosphere, others argued that he opened the way for constructive action and at last set in motion an administration defense.

These aides freely admit that if the President cannot rid himself of the Watergate albatross his ability to govern in the next 3½ years will be severely undermined.