

Friday, April 27, 1973

Lawyer for 2 White House aides

By a Sun Staff Correspondent

Washington—John J. Wilson, a Washington attorney representing two top-level White House aides in the Watergate case, conferred yesterday with a federal prosecutor at United States District Court but refused to confirm or deny that his clients were about to appear before the grand jury.

Mr. Wilson's meeting with Earl J. Silbert, assistant U.S. attorney, came in the wake of White House meetings with President Nixon as well as with his clients, H. R. Halde- man, the presidential chief of staff, and John D. Ehrlichman, the chief domestic adviser.

The lawyer, a well-known criminal trial attorney in the capital, met with the President Wednesday and last weekend. He has conferred several times with Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman.

After Nixon statement

He was retained as their representative last week—on the day Mr. Nixon announced that there had been "major new developments" in the case and promised that anyone in the executive branch or in the government who was indicted would be immediately suspended.

The appearance of Mr. Wilson at the U.S. attorney's office, reportedly for the second time within two days, fueled rumors that indictments in the Watergate case might be imminent.

There has been speculation that announcement of the anticipated executive staff house-cleaning will be delayed until the expected Watergate indictments are handed down by the grand jury.

sees prosecutor, Nixon

Mr. Wilson refused to comment on the content of his discussion with Mr. Silbert, but when asked whether his clients would respond only to a subpoena to appear before the grand jury, said, "They will respond to an invitation."

At the White House, Ronald L. Ziegler, the presidential press secretary, denied a published report that Melvin R. Laird, the former secretary of defense, had been asked to take over as Mr. Nixon's chief administrator, chiefly for the purpose of purging the executive staff of anyone who might prove to be linked directly to the Watergate scandal.

According to Mr. Ziegler, the President had not offered a position to Mr. Laird.

"The President has not, as a matter of fact, talked to anyone and has authorized no one to approach anyone about replacing anyone on the White House staff," he said.

The press secretary confirmed Mr. Nixon's Wednesday meeting with Mr. Wilson and said it had been arranged so that the President could "get his perspective on developments in the Watergate case."

On the vice presidential side of the White House, Mr. Agnew told a group of students at the Harvard Republican Club that in relation to possible Watergate developments he would "have to resign . . . if I found myself unable to continue on the basis of conscience."

The Vice President, who Wednesday complained about "rumor, hearsay, leaks and speculation" in the Watergate

affair, was replying to a question regarding his course of action if President Nixon were shown to have prior knowledge of the political bugging.

"I'd have to wait and see what all the facts about prior knowledge indicated," Mr. Agnew said.

He continued, "One thing is clear . . . that is if I found myself unable to continue on a basis of conscience, I wouldn't stay here as Vice President and use this as a pulpit to criticize the President. I would have to resign."

He emphasized that this did not mean he had any intention of resigning, "because I still have confidence that the President has not been involved in a way that would shock my conscience."

George P. Shultz, the Secretary of the Treasury, said in a television interview last night that the Watergate business "is something that needs to be cleaned up, and whatever the facts are, gotten out in an orderly way, people who have committed crimes brought to justice."

"We need to do this and that's what the President is going about. It's a painful exercise, but one that we have to do," he said.

Meantime, the New York

City Bar Association, one of the largest groups of lawyers in the country, was urging the President to put an independent lawyer in charge of the Watergate investigation.

Calling for appointment of an "eminent lawyer," Orville H. Schell, Jr., the president of the 10,000-member association, stressed legal concern about Justice Department control of the probe, on the grounds of

both conflict of interest and professional ethics.

The association's proposal was endorsed by Senator Jacob K. Javits (R., N.Y.). It came simultaneously with the third complaint to emanate this week from Representative Henry S. Reuss (D., Wis.) about the appointment of Henry E. Petersen, assistant attorney general, to head the Watergate investigation.

Mr. Reuss, who contends that Mr. Petersen contributed to the early efforts to block a thorough investigation of the Watergate matter, demanded that the assistant attorney general reveal what he knew about White House attempts to discourage the seven Watergate defendants from implicating higher-ups in the case.

He quoted a statement made September 23, 1972, by Mr. Petersen that "the jail doors will close behind the seven men now charged with the break-in before they ever reveal further details of the affair."

The public had a right to know on what that prediction was based, Mr. Reuss said.

At the U.S. District Court, where the grand jury has resumed its deliberations on the Watergate case, Mr. Silbert, the assistant U.S. attorney, said he had sent transcripts of secret testimony by all grand jury witnesses to Mr. Petersen.

Asked if Mr. Petersen was providing the White House with transcripts, Mr. Silbert said, "I hope not."

He said he had received a telephone call from Mr. Petersen formally requesting the testimony, and admitted that this was not routine procedure.

Mr. Silbert added, "A. He's my boss. B. I trust Henry Petersen."

Mr. Petersen was made responsible for the President's inquiry into the Watergate case April 19, when Richard G.

Kleindienst, the Attorney General, withdrew on the basis of "personal and professional" relationship with some of those persons implicated in the grand jury investigation.

More than a dozen persons,

including John N. Mitchell, the former attorney general, and Dwight L. Chapin, a former presidential aide and assistant to Mr. Haldeman, have testified recently before the grand jury.