

Top Aides' Lawyer Calls On Nixon

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Washington

John J. Wilson, a 71-year-old Washington lawyer with a reputation for combative ness, has emerged as a central figure in the Watergate case.

Wilson was hired last week to represent H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, two key presidential aides who have been implicated in the case. Last Thursday and again on Wednesday, he met alone with President Nixon at the White House.

Yesterday morning, Wilson's long black limousine with the license plate "JJW-2" was parked in the White House driveway, but presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said he was there to see someone else — presumably his clients, Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

And yesterday afternoon, Wilson visited the federal prosecutor in the Watergate case, Earl J. Silbert. He was seen at the court house late

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Wednesday as well.

Ziegler responded to nearly 100 questions on the Watergate case at a press briefing that lasted more than an hour. Reports continued to circulate that some sort of White House staff shakeup is imminent, but the press secretary would not confirm them. Some White House sources said the President had decided to do nothing — for the moment.

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JOHN J. WILSON
Two White House clients

Ziegler denied that either the President or "anyone authorized to speak for him" had offered to anyone either a position on the White House staff or a mandate to conduct a reorganization of the staff. He applied the denial specifically to a Washington Post story reporting that congressional sources had said former Defense Secretary Melvin L. Laird had been offered Haldeman's chief of staff job but had turned it down.

Nonetheless, members of the staff continued to suggest men to whom the President might turn if he decides on a house-cleaning. Among them were Donald Rumsfeld, a former staff member now ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; William Ruckelshaus, head of the Environmental Protection Agency; and Bryce Harlow, who lobbied for the White House in two administrations and now lobbies for Procter and Gamble.

ADVICE

Mr. Nixon has turned for advice in recent days to a large number of persons whom he has known for some time. It became

known, for example, that he has talked by telephone with Robert H. Finch, the former secretary of health, education and welfare and an old California friend.

Murray Chotiner, the President's chief political adviser in his congressional days, was seen entering the White House earlier this week. There were also unconfirmed reports that Mr. Nixon had talked with Charles S. Rhyne, a former president of the American Bar Association, and a classmate of the President's in law school.

Ziegler said that he remains under orders from Henry E. Petersen, the assistant attorney general in charge of the case, not to discuss most of its aspects with reporters. To answer all questions, he said, would be to "prejudge" possibly innocent individuals or "to lead you as reporters to draw conclusions that may be false."

FRIENDLY

But for the second consecutive day, in a noticeable departure from past conferences, Ziegler went out of his way to respond in a friendly and patient manner. There were no wisecracks, and his replies were studded with "sirs" and "ma'ams."

Ziegler gave a somewhat more detailed account than he had previously of the President's role in the "personal investigation" of the Watergate case that Mr. Nixon announced last Tuesday. It included, Ziegler said, four principal activities:

- Consultations with a large number of people outside the Administration.
- Discussions with members of the staff about their knowledge of the case.
- Requests to members of the staff to "determine certain things" for him.
- Detailed daily consultations with Petersen.