

Support for Nixon

Hickel's Softer Words

Washington

Although Walter J. Hickel isn't having any cozy personal chats with President Nixon these days, he expounded a conciliatory theme yesterday in the manner of a man who wants to stay in the club.

Fielding questions at the National Press Club, the secretary of interior said he isn't planning to leave the Cabinet, insisted he supports the President's military decisions on Vietnam and Cambodia, and claimed that Mr. Nixon is trying hard to take the White House to the people.

He even said that after his famous letter to President Nixon was leaked to the public, presumably irritating the White House, a presidential aide called him and said "... you're on the right track."

But Hickel, a blunt-spoken Alaskan who has trouble concealing his feelings at times, acknowledged that he has



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Hickel said a Nixon aide encouraged him

not seen Mr. Nixon alone since the letter was written, urging in part that the President and his Cabinet members engage in frequent personal dialogue. He saw him recently at gatherings of top Administration officials in the White House, he said.

Asked how he could

remain in the Cabinet after his critical remarks about the Administration and student dissenters were made public, Hickel answered somewhat cryptically: "That's not for me to decide."

But his differences with Vice President Spiro Agnew over the na-

ture of student dissent seemed unabated. He was asked in a climactic, joking question: "Would you go spearfishing or bear-hunting with Vice President Agnew?" (It was a reference to Mr. Agnew's propensity for clouting his gaming partners with golf balls and tennis balls).

"If I went spearfishing with him, he might get more fish than I would and if we went bear-hunting he might get more bear than I would," Hickel replied. "But I'm willing to hunt students with him."

He also had displayed what appeared to be a cool attitude toward the White House's Council on Environmental Quality, which some observers feel is setting more policy in that field than the Department of Interior. "Sometimes I think they have the authority without the responsibility," said Hickel.

Times-Post Service