

Richardson Says He Agrees With Nixon on Busing

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr.

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Aug. 31—Elliot L. Richardson, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, asserted today that he was in total agreement with President Nixon's policy of limited school busing. He denied that he had considered resigning his post after Mr. Nixon publicly repudiated a desegregation plan drawn up by Mr. Richardson's own agency.

It was Mr. Richardson's first public comment on the volatile busing issue since Aug. 3, when, in what was widely interpreted as a slap at the Secretary and his associates, Mr. Nixon ordered the Justice Department to "disavow" a plan approved by Mr. Richardson, Attorney General John N. Mitchell and members of the White House staff for extensive crosstown school busing in Austin, Tex.

There were reports at the time that Mr. Richardson, who left for an Alaskan vacation the afternoon of the President's statement, had briefly considered handing in his resignation.

Today, however, having returned from his holiday and having conferred with Mr. Nixon for an hour, he appeared before newsmen and not only denied those reports but also said he had been and continued to be in complete support of Mr. Nixon's busing policy. The essence of that policy, as set forth in the Aug. 3 statement, was to achieve desegregation but to do so by holding "busing to the minimum required by law."

"I did not consider resignation," Mr. Richardson told newsmen gathered at the



United Press International

President Nixon with Elliot L. Richardson, Health, Education and Welfare Secretary, at San Clemente meeting.

San Clemente Inn. "My understanding of the President's policy on school busing was perfectly clear before all this occurred [on Aug. 3] and is perfectly clear now. He believes that busing should not be used except to the minimum necessary extent. He believes it is a good thing in principle for children to attend school in their neighborhoods. I knew this was his view, I supported that view before Aug. 3, and it was understood by my colleagues before Aug. 3."

Asked later why, if he understood the President's views, he authorized the submission to the Federal District Court in Austin of a proposal requiring considerable busing, Mr.

Richardson said, "The specific application of policy in any given case is always a matter of judgment."

But apart from this fleeting and oblique admission that he and other high officials may in fact have gone beyond Mr. Nixon's policy in the Austin busing plan, the burden of Secretary Richardson's responses today was that there had not been and would not be differences between himself and the President over the busing issue.

Asked at one point whether it was fair to say he was "in total and complete agreement with the President's policy and the President's statements in support of that policy and with

the spirit of that policy," he replied, "That is correct."

In addition, far from expressing any residual bitterness at the President's actions, Mr. Richardson sought to defend the Aug. 3 statement by characterizing it not as a repudiation of him or his policies. He termed it a necessary effort by Mr. Nixon to clarify—for the benefit of the district courts and the officials in charge of desegregation policy—the President's fundamental opposition to busing as a technique to achieve racial balance in public schools.

Mr. Richardson's comments, which amounted to a statement that official harmony on the issue now prevailed throughout the Nixon high command, form yet another chapter in a struggle within the Administration to devise a politically acceptable response to the Supreme Court's landmark ruling of April 20. The Court held that busing could be used to desegregate the schools unless "the time or distance is so great as to risk either the health of the children or significantly impinge on the educational process."

Secretary Richardson said he and the President had only "touched on" school busing as part of a general discussion of the progress of school openings in the South this year.

He said that he reported to Mr. Nixon that things were going well so far, "in an atmosphere of calm, quiet cooperation." He said further that his agency would seek to bring about more desegregation by cooperation rather than coercion. He added at one point:

"We do not think that brandishing a big stick or sending in Federal marshals is a productive way to succeed."