

Nixon Denies His Aide Knew About Bugging

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Key Biscayne, Fla.

President Nixon denied yesterday that White House counsel John Dean III had any prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging and said he has "absolute and total confidence," in Dean.

The President telephoned Dean from his office in Key Biscayne to discuss with him a Los Angeles report that Dean and the former presidential assistant Jeb Stuart Magruder had advance knowledge of the bugging of Democratic headquarters.

"The president has complete confidence in Mr. Dean and wanted me again here this morning to publicly express President Nixon's absolute and total confidence in Mr. Dean in this regard," Ziegler said.

MAGRUDER

Ziegler issued no similar statement about Magruder but called attention to Magruder's own recent denial of the charge. Throughout the Watergate affair, Ziegler has limited his comments to the alleged involvement of White House staff members and he said that responding to the charge about Magruder was "not relevant to this particular podium."

Magruder served as a deputy director for the Committee to Re-Elect the President during Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign.

The Los Angeles Times reported in yesterday's editions that convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. told Senate in-

vestigators that both Dean and Magruder had prior knowledge of the bugging. Ziegler called the accusation "very extraordinary" and said it had prompted the telephone call from the president to Dean.

Ziegler also criticized a "hastily" called press conference conducted Sunday afternoon by Samuel Dash, counsel for the Senate select committee investigating the Watergate charges.

"I would suggest that that

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would not appear to me to be an orderly and judicious method of procedure," Ziegler said.

Dash declined at the press conference to discuss the substance of the discussions he had held with McCord. But he said that McCord had "named names" and was supplying the committee with a "full and honest account" of the Watergate conspiracy.

In other developments:

• Senator Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), one of the seven members of the Senate Watergate committee, said he has independently established that White House aides were involved in the bugging, as well as other sabotage and espionage activities against the Democrats. Weicker said he has no evidence that President Nixon condoned such "illegal practices that demean the American process," but the senator expressed "a thorough disgust with the men around the president."

• During a closed-door meeting, members of the Senate's Watergate investigation committee were briefed on McCord's infor-

mation and voted to allow live television coverage of the committee's upcoming hearings. Senator Sam J. Ervin (Dem.-N.C.) chairman of the select committee, said the hearings definitely will begin before May.

• E. Howard Hunt Jr., another Watergate conspirator, reportedly is considering providing information about the bugging, but will refuse to voluntarily talk to the Senate committee because of a fear of leaks to the press, according to a source close to Hunt.

• G. Gordon Liddy, who the government alleged was the "boss" of the Watergate operation, took the Fifth Amendment 20 times as he appeared before the federal grand jury that yesterday reopened its investigation into the possible involvement of others.

• Washington Star-News staff writer Mary McGrory said she encountered McCord yesterday coming out of a northwest Washington drugstore and he confirmed to her that he told Senate investigators that Dean and Magruder had previous knowledge of the bugging.

Weicker's comments appeared to reflect increasing unhappiness among Senate Republicans about the White House. Another GOP senator, who asked not to be named, described the recent Watergate disclosures as "absolutely appalling" and said "the President would be well advised to clean out his house."

Weicker, who has been conducting his own inquiry into the Watergate case and related matters since his appointment to the select committee, said his preliminary information alone is sufficient "to come forth with some sort of sensational disclosures."

Senate sources familiar with Weicker's inquiry said he has developed "pretty hard evidence" on White House involvement in the bugging and other undercover activities.

In comments to reporters, Weicker observed that specific violation of the laws "is not the only issue involved, though some people in the

*Ziegler, 11 Jun 73, says it was Haldeman, not Nixon, who called Dean.

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administration would like to have it drawn that way, as narrowly as possible." He added: "It's just as bad in my book for certain persons at the presidential level to condone illegal practices . . . I don't give a damn if there's law on the books against it or not."

"Does the Watergate lead directly to the President?" Weicker was asked. He replied: "Well, I am not prepared to go ahead and name any names unless I have the facts to back it up. Do I think that I will have the facts and will there be other names? The answer is yes."

"Other names . . . in the White House?" the senator

was asked.

"That's right," he replied. "Do I have a broader picture? The answer is yes. Do I think it goes beyond Watergate? The answer is yes."

"Somebody had to start it. Somebody had to abet it. Mr. Hunt and Mr. Liddy and Mr. McCord et al didn't just get together in a barroom one night and decide they were going to do something gratuitous for the Republican Party."

While generally issuing denunciations of the leak of McCord's testimony to the Senate Watergate committee, a number of Republican senators called on the president to put the accurate information about the Watergate on the public record.

It was learned, for example, that members of the Republican leadership in the senate have advised the president to permit Dean to testify before the select committee at public hearings.