

Strong Nixon Denial
He Knew of Bugging (6 col)

Deny President in on Hushup

SF Examiner

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Examiner, Political Editor

KEY BISCAYNE — The White House today issued its strongest denial yet that President Nixon knew of the Watergate bugging or took part in any attempt to hush up the scandal.

Observers were quick to note, however, that the statement contained no denial of reports that the President knew about the coverup effort.

This vital question prompted the reading of the statement here by deputy news secretary Gerald Warren.

Reshaping Staff

During today's press briefing, Nixon was working in the seclusion of his Florida villa with his new chief of staff, Gen. Alexander Haig Jr., on plans to reshape the White House staff.

Haig, who joined Nixon here last night, is expected to fly back to Washington with the President tonight.

The latest press-White House exchange on Watergate started with a question on Nixon's reaction to Martha Mitchell's suggestion that the President resign.

"No reaction," Warren replied. "I don't have to call your attention to the reaction of Mrs. Mitchell's husband to that."

'Nixon Unaware'

The President's spokesman was asked if it's true that Nixon did congratulate former White House counsel John Dean III for the latter's work in the attempt to coverup the Watergate case.

Warren then read the statement which he said the President knew in advance would be relayed to newsmen. In it Warren said:

"The President's position

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on the entire matter was covered very clearly in his television and radio address of last Monday . . .

"I want to say that any suggestion that the President was aware of the Watergate operation is untrue.

"Any suggestion that the President participated in any coverup activities is untrue.

"Any suggestion that the President ever authorized the offering of clemency to anyone in this case is also false.

"Having said that, I want to again call your attention to the matter that we have investigators, a grand jury, courts and the Ervin select (Senate) committee all trying to get facts and sort out the truth from the false in this matter."

No Further Comment

Again Warren said there would be no comment on individual news developments.

Asked about seemingly apparent gaps in the statement, Warren repeatedly refused to enlarge on what he had said.

Even this, though, was a departure from the recent practice of press secretary Ronald Ziegler and Warren. They had previously declined comment on grounds it might prejudice the prosecution.

Packard, Finch

Warren also said he had no fresh information on two Californians said to be under consideration for Presidential appointments.

One is David Packard, former deputy secretary of defense, whom Nixon would like to lure back from Palo Alto to the Pentagon as defense secretary.

The wealthy electronics manufacturer would replace Elliot L. Richardson, an administration favorite, tapped last week for the vacancy in the attorney general's chair to take charge of the Watergate investigation.

The other is Robert H. Finch, Nixon's onetime political protege now practicing law in Los Angeles and trying to decide whether to run for the 1974, Republican nomination for governor in California.

Finch, former secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, might come back to the White House temporarily, this time as an interim replacement for former domestic adviser John Ehrlichman.

Ziegler also participated in today's huddle with the President and Gen. Haig, who was named Friday to replace White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman.