

Aides' Immunity-- New Nixon Stand

Washington

President Nixon has given Attorney General-designate Elliot L. Richardson the authority to decide whether to grant immunity to any present or former government officials who are to testify about Watergate, White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said yesterday.

Richardson has "total authority" to conduct the investigation and to decide on a prosecutor as well as on the question of immunity, Ziegler said.

This would appear to reverse the position the President took April 17 when he said he had told investigators that "no individual holding, in the past or at present, a position of major importance in the administration should be given immunity from prosecution."

Mr. Nixon has largely taken himself out of the investigation of the Watergate affair, Ziegler said. He said the President has not conferred with Richardson nor Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, formerly the Justice Department official in charge of the Watergate case, for four or five days.

The President is working on the reorganization of the White House staff and other governmental matters but is spending "very little" time on the investigation, Ziegler said.

Emphatically denying rumors that Mr. Nixon might consider resigning, Ziegler said, "The President intends to and is proceeding with the work of this government and administration.

"He is continuing with his work and will continue with

it," the press secretary said. "There are many things he feels should be done in the next 3½ years."

The President also is working on other foreign and domestic matters, Ziegler emphasized.

In answer to questions, Ziegler extended the scope of the White House statement Monday proclaiming the President's innocence in the Watergate break-in and the coverup that followed.

Deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren issued a statement Monday declaring that "any suggestion that the President participated in any coverup activity or activities is untrue."

When Ziegler was told that the statement did not deny Mr. Nixon's "awareness" of a coverup, he said the original statement "was not drawn to make a distinction between participation and awareness."

The statement was issued because of allegations that had been made regarding a coverup and was intended to deny the President's involvement, He said.

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