

'Spontaneous' Support

White House Seen Seeking VFW Calls

By William Claiborne
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A White House official contacted the Veterans of Foreign Wars and several other large national organizations seeking telegrams and other "spontaneous" expressions of support of the televised press conference President Nixon had scheduled for last night.

A VFW official, who asked not to be identified, said he received a call Tuesday night from William F. Rhatican, an assistant to White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, in which Rhatican suggested VFW members send favorable telegrams to Mr. Nixon after the press conference.

The White House and congressional offices have been swamped with telegrams, letters and telephone calls—an overwhelming majority of which have advocated impeachment of Mr. Nixon—as a result of Mr. Nixon's firing of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

"He asked for telegrams of support, and said he'd send a copy of the President's statement on the tapes," the VFW official said. "We've had other requests from them of a similar nature, and we have always said that we do not make such comments except in the event that we've had a mandate from the membership in the form of a resolution," he said.

E. Douglas Kenna, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said Rhatican made a telephone call Wednesday to Eugene Hardy, a registered lobbyist for NAM, to discuss the press conference, which was postponed as a result of the Middle East crisis.

Kenna described Rhatican's call as "purely a routine notification that there would be a press conference and we might be interested." The association, Kenna said, "looks at all elements of a press conference and then decides whether to comment."

The White House said last night that Rhatican was in New Jersey and would be unavailable for comment.

A spokesman for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said his organization has frequently been approached by

the White House to solicit reaction to the President's handling of various issues, but he denied that such was the case following the Cox firing.

"We don't react on schedule to this kind of thing," said Charles Armentrout, the spokesman.

Armentrout said the White House asked for—and received — reaction from U.S. Chamber of Commerce members on the nomination of Gerald R. Ford as Vice President.

An official of the American Legion's national office here said nobody in that organization had been contacted by the White House about the President's press conference. "We operate only out of mandate by the national committee or conventions," the official said.

The Nixon administration had attempted to use veterans' organizations on other occasions, according to memos that were released with testimony by White House aide Patrick Buchanan during the Senate Watergate hearings.

A March 14, 1972, memo from Buchanan and White House aide Ken Khachigian to then-Nixon re-election campaign chief John N. Mitchell described a plan to "use VFW to mail Muskie's defense record" to all its members. The memo describes a variety of methods to undermine the presidential candidacy of Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine).

Meanwhile, congressional offices said last night that public opinion messages concerning the Cox firing continue to pour into Washington, if at a slightly more moderate rate than during the first three days of the week.

A spokesman for Sen. John V. Tunney (D-Calif.), whose office has been one of the leaders in public opinion messages received, said 6,891 telegrams have favored impeachment of the President, while 189 have opposed the measure. Since Mr. Nixon capitulated on the tapes issue Wednesday, Tunney has received 859 telegrams urging impeachment, and 51 against it.