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NIXON AIDE BACKS REPORT ON SHIFTS

Ziegler Expects Changes—
Denials Made for Three

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 19 — The White House allowed to stand today without serious or direct challenge — widespread reports that some shifts in the Nixon cabinet were likely before the second half of the President's term begins next January.

"I think you can say there will be some changes as we go along," Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said this morning.

Mr. Ziegler refused to comment specifically, however, on reports published this morning that the shifts would involve the resignations of Walter J. Hickel, Secretary of the Interior, David M. Kennedy, Secretary of the Treasury, and Clifford M. Hardin, Secretary of Agriculture. He also said emphatically that Mr. Nixon had received no resignations, apart from one just offered by Hilary Sandoval Jr. of the Small Business Administration.

But other White House sources said that Mr. Nixon was likely to make some changes and that the Interior and Treasury departments were at the top of the list. They were puzzled only by the sudden speculation concerning Mr. Hardin and said that as far as they knew Mr. Nixon was not eager to replace him and that he should not now be included on a list of vulnerable Cabinet members.

A spokesman for the Agriculture Department said tonight, "Mr. Hardin intends to stay on his job as long as the President wishes him to, and there is every indication that the President wants him to stay. The Secretary has definitely not submitted his resignation."

Kennedy Report Doubted

A Treasury source said that Mr. Kennedy had not submitted his resignation, either. The source said he expected the Secretary to be around "for a long time to come" and that speculation about his departure early next year was erroneous. At a luncheon for Cabinet wives today, Mrs. Kennedy said, "It's just a rumor."

Mr. Mickel—who angered the White House last spring by accusing the President, in a letter that "leaked," of insensitivity to the aspirations of young people—was reached at his home late tonight.

He said he had "no intention of resigning" and had received "no indication" that the White House was "dissatisfied with what I am doing."

"This speculation is disruptive," he conceded, "but the President hired me. And until he asks me to leave, I intend to stay."

This morning's reports about the possible departures of Mr. Hickel, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Hardin were based on a discussion yesterday between a group of newsmen and a high White House official at a "background" meeting. Under the rules governing these sessions, the identity of the official could not be disclosed.

White House officials emphatically denied today that their colleague had been instructed to "leak" the President's plans to the assembled reporters. But it was difficult for observers here to believe that the official, who is well-connected in the White House, was speaking idly or without authority.

In addition, there was no visible evidence today that either Mr. Nixon or his staff were angered by the accounts of yesterday's meeting, which appeared prominently in some newspapers, except to the extent that some aides refused to place Mr. Hardin in the same category of vulnerability as Mr. Hickel and Mr. Kennedy.

On Capitol Hill, meanwhile, Senator Ted Stevens, Republican of Alaska, said he had asked the White House to consult with him about the fate of his old friend, Mr. Hickel. He said the White House had not talked to him.

"So I don't think they've made a decision," he said, "and I don't think they'll make it. He's done a good job. He's got a constituency now among conservationists and natural resources people."