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White House bludgeon hits Glasgow, others

WASHINGTON — A glittering example of why an unwholesome malaise is now spreading through top levels of the Nixon Administration is the heavy-handed way the White House fired six top Interior Department officials following Secretary Walter Hickel's dismissal on Nov. 25.

A telephone call from the White House to Interior Undersecretary Fred J. Russell on Nov. 20 hatched the secret plot. Russell has close connections with the President's White House family. For months he and White House aides John Ehrlichman and John C. Whitaker had been panting to clean out what they regarded—in some cases correctly—as departmental dead wood.

Informed by that phone call that Hickel's ouster was imminent, Russell made his final recommendations on who else should be axed. The list was longer than the six subsequently fired, the others having won at least temporary grace by the reeking publicity that grew out of the inept handling of the first six.

Having submitted his list, Russell slipped out of town for a long Thanksgiving Day weekend. He next surfaced with a transcontinental telephone call to Interior Deputy Undersecretary William Rogers on the morning of Nov. 27. That call ordered Rogers to prepare his office for temporary occupancy by White House personnel chief Frederic V. Malek, designated by Ehrlichman as the executioner.

But in his haste to clean out dead wood, Malek struck not with a scalpel but with a bludgeon, spreading terror through one department, alarming others, and vastly complicating the job of incoming Secretary Rogers Morton.



Dr. Leslie Glasgow
Victim of revenge?

Moreover, the firing of Dr. Leslie Glasgow as assistant secretary for fish, wildlife, and parks smacked of revenge by Russell with White House consent. On four separate occasions in the past eight months, Russell overruled the uninspired but competent Glasgow on important fish-and-wildlife decisions. In each case, Glasgow took his case to Hickel and won a reversal of Russell's veto.

Glasgow also had a hot feud going with Charles H. Meacham, commissioner of fish and wildlife and a member of Hickel's Alaska mafia who was extremely inept with Congress. When Hickel was fired, Glasgow aides were certain that Meacham would be eased out by Morton. Instead, Glasgow and Meacham both were fired by Malek, with no offer of 30 days' pay. Moreover, thickening the plot was the fact that a White House aide took the trouble to telephone Glasgow with the soothing message: sit tight, you're safe.