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Reporters and attorneys in the room were stunned that the President, a lawyer, would make such a statement while a jury is still hearing testimony.

Not immediately, in about a half hour, news secretary Ronald Ziegler appeared before reporters, as he put it, to clarify the statement. Ziegler did not begin by admitting any mistake had been made, but he spoke of "alleged charges" and said the President's intention was simply to dramatize the damage newsmen could do the court system by putting so much focus on a trial such as Manson's. After repeated questioning Ziegler finally implied a retraction. Attorney/General John Mitchel said, "I don't believe the President made a charge."

Four hours later as the President's plane arrived over Washington, he delayed its landing by a half hour to allow completion of a mimeographed statement. This written statement was handed out to reporters by aides. Observers noted that the original statement saying Manson was guilty was made before microphones and cameras; the partial written retraction, given in Washington, was not.

In it the President said, in part, "The last thing I would do is prejudice the legal rights of any person. The defendants should be presumed to be innocent at this stage of the trial."