

PRESS CRITICIZED ON NIXON REMARK

Coast Congressman Calls
'Lapse' on Manson Minor

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr.
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 5 — A California Congressman declared today that President Nixon's comments on the murder trial of Charles M. Manson, while "wrong," had been "relatively unimportant news" and that the press had acted "irresponsibly" in reporting them. "The President spoke to a small group of newsmen a thousand miles from the Manson trial," Representative

Charles E. Wiggins, a Republican, said in a speech on the House floor. "He did not say a word to the jury or anyone else connected with the [Los Angeles] trial. But the press has been veritably shouting the words of the President into the ear of anyone connected with that trial without letting up, for two days."

"The President's statement was news, our friends in the press gallery are murmuring," Mr. Wiggins went on. "The news, and it is relatively unimportant news, is the President's lapse of judgment to the possible prejudice of a criminal defendant. His exact words are not necessary to the story, and to repeat them in dramatic headlines can only be intended to sell newspaper or prejudice the defendant."

The statement to which Mr. Wiggins referred was the Pres-

ident's declaration in Denver on Monday that Manson was "guilty, directly or indirectly, of eight murders without reason."

Mr. Wiggins did not say that Mr. Nixon had made the statement — which he retracted four hours later — before television cameras for later rebroadcast to millions of listeners.

Albert Defends Press

In rebuttal, the House Democratic leader, Carl Albert, of Oklahoma, said that the press would have been derelict had it ignored the President's comment.

Representative Hale Boggs, Democrat of Louisiana, termed Mr. Nixon's statement "indefensible" and Mr. Wiggins's assertions "the most amazing speech I've ever heard in the

30 years I've been in the House."

Meanwhile, the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler refused to talk about the Manson case and said this afternoon that he would take no further questions on the subject.

In an informal discussion with a few reporters after his morning briefing, however, Mr. Ziegler indicated that Mr. Nixon had not fully sensed the implications of his remark until well after he had delivered it.

Mr. Ziegler said that he had realized minutes after the President made the remark that it might require some explanation. The press secretary said he had conferred with John D. Ehrlichman, the President's chief domestic adviser and a former attorney, and then had summoned the press back to

St. Louis, Aug. 10 -

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In a wide-ranging news conference after his speech, [Attorney General John N. Mitchell] also made the following statements:

He said that he was immediately aware that President Nixon had made a slip of the tongue last Monday when he described Charles M. Manson, who is now being tried for murder in California as "guilty" of eight murders. Mr. Mitchell said that he stood mute beside Mr. Nixon because "it is not the proper posture of anybody to correct the President of the United States when the President is speaking."

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(Clipping: "Mitchell Sets Rules Limiting Subpoenas Issued to Newsmen," this file 11 Aug. 70 PRESS.)

the briefing room for a "clarification."

It was not until Mr. Nixon emerged from a long meeting with law enforcement officials, Mr. Ziegler recalled, that he informed the President that his comment on Manson had caused considerable commotion.

When so informed, Mr. Ziegler recalled, Mr. Nixon then turned to him, evidently in some surprise, and said: "I said charged."

In other words, Mr. Ziegler suggested, the President went through the afternoon believing he had referred to Manson as "charged" with eight murders rather than "guilty" of eight murders.

Subsequently, Mr. Nixon and Mr. Ziegler prepared a second "clarification" aboard the President's plane, Air Force One. The five-paragraph statement was

handed to newsmen when they arrived at Andrews Air Force Base Monday evening.

Mr. Ziegler's comments tended to reinforce two impressions widely held among observers here: that Mr. Nixon, who had delivered his accusation during the course of an emotional defense of the country's judicial system, had not fully realized what he had said; and that the staff had not informed him of the storm his remark had caused until later in the day.

There are many persons here who believe that a quick Presidential explanation for, or retraction of, his comment would have carried more weight than his press secretary's efforts to clarify the statement, and would inevitably have reduced the impact and the news value of the original comment.