

AIDE TERMS NIXON WILLING TO ASSIST BUGGING INQUIRIES

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Says White House May Let Senate Panel Query Staff Members in Private

RESPONSE TO CRITICISM

President Tells Associates to Go Before Watergate Grand Jury if Called
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WASHINGTON, March 30— Responding to mounting criticism, the White House indicated today its readiness to compromise with the Senate's investigation of the Watergate case on the issue of furnishing witnesses and information from President Nixon's personal staff.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, announced at the same time that the President had issued an affirmative order to all members of his staff to testify if called before a Federal grand jury that is continuing to look into the Watergate raid.

With respect to both the court and Congressional inquiries into political espionage, Mr. Ziegler said that Mr. Nixon was willing to cooperate in any way that did not do "violence to the separation of powers." In either investigation, however, appearances by members of the White House staff would be limited to sessions closed to the public.

H.R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, and John W. Dean 3d, the White House Counsel, recently connected by hearsay to the advance planning of the Watergate raid, are believed never to have appeared before the grand jury investigating the case.

Aides Before Jury

But last summer and fall the grand jury called, and heard from, other senior advisers to the President, including John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General; Jeb Stuart Magruder, a onetime White House

aide and later deputy manager of the Nixon re-election campaign, and Charles W. Colson, a former special counsel to the President.

Mr. Nixon has invoked the doctrine of executive privilege to prevent his staff from testifying before the senate's Watergate investigation, but he has never applied the doctrine to judicial proceedings. The president himself is legally immune from being required to appear in a judicial proceeding, but whether his aides could be required to appear is legally unclear.

Mr. Ziegler presented his statements today as reaffirmation of old policy to clear up certain "misunderstandings" about the White House position.

But, for the first time the White House appeared to be showing concern about the bipartisan attacks on the Administration's conduct in the case. Also for the first time, Mr. Ziegler's remarks, made after long White House meetings, had a conciliatory tone.

The change was believed to be at least in part a result of concern, expressed by a number of Republicans in Congress and elsewhere, that the White House might be covering up involvement of Presidential aides and others close to the President in the operations of the men who broke into and bugged the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate complex last June.

Mr. Ziegler delivered a long oral statement on the subject at midday shortly before Mr. Nixon departed for his home in San Clemente, Calif., where he is scheduled to remain for about 10 days.

The statement was made at

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Mr. Ziegler's daily press briefing, which was two hours late, presumably because of the "meetings" concerned with the Watergate investigations.

Mr. Ziegler, who almost never mentions the Watergate case unless asked about it, said he was speaking out because of concern over a "series of unsubstantiated charges" that have been emerging from the select Senate committee headed by Senator Sam J. Ervin, Democrat of North Carolina, that have linked White House staff members to the case.

Denying that staff members were involved, Mr. Ziegler said, "The personal rights of individual members have been abused by procedures that are less than orderly and judicial."

"The public media and the White House news briefings are not the place to make an evaluation of these charges," Mr. Ziegler said.

Two men who were connected with Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign organization have been convicted in the Watergate burglary and bugging and five other men, one a former White House consultant, have pleaded guilty.

James W. McCord Jr., one of those convicted, has testified under oath before the Ervin committee that his fellow conspirators gave him the impression that they had cleared their clandestine operations with ranking officials in the Administration, several sources have said.

Mr. Ziegler insisted that the White House position all along has been one of cooperation on the Watergate matter. The President has said that, in order to preserve the separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches, he would not let Mr. Dean or other staff members appear before a formal meeting of a Congressional committee, and Mr. Ziegler said today that this policy was unchanged. However he went on to say:

"Any member of the White House staff called by the grand jury will be required by the President to testify. That is a restatement of policy in effect."

In the past, however, no such categorical statement of obedience to grand jury summons was made publicly.

'Ready to Cooperate'

As to the Ervin committee, Mr. Ziegler said, "We are ready to cooperate, to work out procedures to meet the needs of the committee without doing violence to the separation of powers."

Mr. Ziegler would not specify what procedure might be acceptable to the President, but he clearly indicated a willingness to reach some compromise between the committee's desire to have Mr. Dean and other officials appear as sworn witnesses in open session and the

White House's offer, made separately to the Senate Judiciary committee, to accept written questions and supply written answers.

One possibility is an appearance of White House officials before closed, informal committee sessions. Disputes over the use of executive privilege to prevent testimony by Presidential aides, on the ground that it would disrupt the orderly functioning of the Government, have frequently been resolved in this manner.

Mr. Ziegler was asked why, if the White House was interested in preserving the separation of powers between the branches of government, the President would order his aides to appear as sworn witnesses before a judicial body but not a legislative body. The question was not answered.

Testimony before a grand jury is secret and is carried out under the direction of Justice Department officials. Testimony before a Congressional committee is usually open.

The White House statement came as Republicans in Congress continued to voice concern about the case.

Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Senate minority floor leader, said he was "deeply disturbed at any developments which taint the political process," adding, "I think the concern is simply that the facts should all be ascertained and made public." Last week, after a meeting with the President, Mr. Scott said he had been assured that Mr. Nixon "had nothing to hide."

Senators Charles McC. Mathias of Maryland and Jacob K. Javits of New York made floor speeches warning that the Watergate affair threatened to damage public confidence in the American political process.

Senator Robert W. Packwood of Oregon called the Watergate case "the most odious issue since the Teapot Dome" and joined other Republicans in urging Mr. Nixon to appoint former Senator John J. Williams, Republican of Delaware, to conduct a new investigation.

Senator Williams was known as a one-man, nonpartisan investigator of waste and corruption when he was in the Senate.