

Ziegler Refuses to Say Dean Data Was Asked

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler declined yesterday to say whether President Nixon ever asked former White House counsel John W. Dean III to make a report on the Watergate case.

At a news conference last Aug. 29, Mr. Nixon said that "under my direction. . . Mr. Dean has conducted a complete investigation of all leads which might involve any present members of the White House staff or anybody in the government.

"I can say categorically that his investigation indicates that no one in the White House staff, no one in this administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

Dean was quoted by Newsweek magazine this week as saying in an interview that the President never asked him for such a report and that he never wrote one.

When asked about the discrepancy between the two statements, Ziegler said that he would like to answer but could not do so because he had an obligation not to infringe on an individual's rights or do anything that might obstruct justice.

Ziegler did say that the President stood on his April 30 television statement to the nation in which he said that the comments he made earlier and those his press secretary had made "were based on the information provided to us at the time we made those comments."

Pressed to say whether the President stood on his Aug. 29 statement, Ziegler declined to give a direct reply and instead referred reporters to the April 30 speech.

In that address, Mr. Nixon said that until March he had discounted press reports and believed reports he had gotten from his staff telling him there was no White House involvement.

When told that the President's word was impugned by the Dean interview, Ziegler angrily replied that the White House press rooms was not the place to sift out the truth.

He also indicated serious White House concern over whether the congressional

investigation to open Thursday under the chairmanship of Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) will arrive at the whole truth.

"There has been considerable concern regarding the impact of the hearings on due process and the rights of individuals," Ziegler commented.

Due process could be violated, he said, because in the hearings there will be no immediate right to cross-examine witnesses as there is in court proceedings.

Asked if he was suggesting that the hearings be postponed until after the federal grand jury completes its investigation, Ziegler said he was suggesting that "very careful consideration be given to how the committee proceeds."

Despite his criticism of the committee, Ziegler declined to associate himself with criticisms made by Agriculture Secretary Earl L. Butz that Ervin was "a publicity-seeking senator" and that he was conducting a political investigation.

"He [Butz] was speaking on his own," Ziegler said, adding that he would characterize neither the senator nor the investigation.

When asked for comment on the suggestion of Sen. Howard H. Baker (R-Tenn.) that the President may be asked "to state his side of the case," Ziegler refused, but then said that Mr. Nixon has reported to the people in his April 30 speech and "will be available . . . at some point" in a news conference.

At another point, he said that the news conference would be "fairly soon."

The President has not held a news conference since March 15, and yesterday the Freedom of Information Committee of Sigma Delta Chi, a journalism fraternity, "urgently recommended" that he hold one immediately.

The presidential news conference should be devoted entirely to Watergate and should be extended from the normal half-hour to a full hour, the committee said through its national chairman, Courtney R. Sheldon, chief of The Christian Science Monitor bureau here.

"It is our opinion that if regular press conferences

were held during the past few years, President Nixon would have had to review the handling of the Watergate matters much earlier than subsequently happened," the statement said.

When asked if former aides H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, whose resignations the President accepted April 30, are still reporting to work, Ziegler said: "I wouldn't say they are reporting to work. They have been assisting in some transition work."

Ziegler said he thought they would complete that work soon.

The President scheduled a meeting today with bipartisan congressional leaders to discuss his ideas about campaign reform proposals.

In his April 30 speech, he said that leaders of both political parties should work out a new set of rules and standards governing campaign practices.