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White House: Clemency Not Offered

By Carroll Kilpatrick
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The White House yesterday flatly denied the allegation that President Nixon offered executive clemency or authorized anyone to offer executive clemency in the Watergate case.

The denials came after James W. McCord, one of the convicted Watergate burglars, told the Senate investigating committee that he had been told the President would grant him clemency after a brief term in prison.

When questioned about McCord's testimony, White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler asserted that the President "never made any offer of clemency" and never authorized anyone to offer clemency in the Watergate case.

Ziegler also repeated his earlier denial that Mr. Nixon participated in an attempted cover-up.

On May 7, the White House issued a statement declaring that any suggestion the President "authorized the offering of clemency to anyone" in the Watergate case is "false."

The press secretary, facing a barrage of questions, said that he would not re-

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spond to the testimony on Capitol Hill except to deny the offer of clemency and to say that the testimony was "based on total hearsay."

When questioned about what were described as increasing suggestions that Mr. Nixon should resign, Ziegler denied that there were many such serious suggestions and made it clear he did not expect any such thing to happen.

"The President has a lot to do and a lot to accomplish in the second term and he fully intends to do that," Ziegler said in a further effort to indicate business almost as usual at the White House.

The President began his day with a Cabinet meeting and then conferred with other officials. He did not watch the television coverage of the Watergate hearings but received written summaries, Ziegler reported for the second straight day.

Today the President and Mrs. Nixon will fly to the Naval Air Station at Norfolk, Va., and then go by helicopter to the aircraft carrier Independence for ceremonies marking Armed Forces Day.

The President will speak from the carrier deck.

A reporter told Ziegler that both former Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Sargent Shriver and Joseph A. Califano, former aide to President Johnson and a Washington attorney, had suggested the President should resign.

"I do not see a mounting point of view along this line at all," Ziegler said. Asserting that there were a number of achievements in the first term, Ziegler said, "Let there be no question about it: the President intends to continue with this work and proceed on the basis of the 1972 election."

The Cabinet meeting was devoted to a discussion of efforts to carry forward domestic and foreign pro-

grams, the press secretary said.

While Mr. Nixon is "fully aware of the scope and impact of the Watergate matter," Ziegler said, he intends to "proceed with the work of his presidency."

Asked if the President felt that the legitimacy of his election was in question as a result of the Watergate disclosures, Ziegler said there was no question regarding the expressions of the American people at the polls or the legitimacy of the election.

There was no agenda at the Cabinet meeting and the President went around the table soliciting views of members on problems they faced, the press secretary said.

Watergate was referred to, but he said it did not take up much time and was not the major focus of the meeting. He would provide no other details.

Later Vice President Agnew said in an interview that "the Cabinet tried something new today. It was not a structured meeting. The President told each member to bring the rest of the Cabinet up to date on what's going on in their departments.

"It was very successful and I found it extremely informative," the Vice President said. "Instead of having an agenda with a presentation by one member, we had kind of a free-wheeling discussion."

Such unstructured meetings cannot be held every time, Agnew said. But the discussion "triggered comments" from other Cabinet members and "everyone went away with a very good feeling," he said.

"I think the President has decided, and indicated at previous Cabinet meetings, more directly with Cabinet that he wanted to work members," the Vice President said.

That will bring about better communication with the President and White House staff and also among Cabinet officers, Agnew said.