

SFChronicle JUN 23 1973

# Report Nixon Was Told Earlier to Drop Aides

## Washington

Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen urged President Nixon on April 15 to suspend John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman immediately because of their involvement in the Watergate scandal, sources close to the case said yesterday.

Mr. Nixon announced the "resignations" of the two officials two weeks later, on April 30, but emphasized that his action should not be "seen by anyone as evidence of any wrongdoing by either one."

At a meeting on April 15, the sources said, Petersen and Richard G. Kleindienst, then attorney general, gave the President a briefing on new evidence that had been uncovered by federal prosecutors.

The evidence allegedly showed that Haldeman, the

former White House chief of staff, and Ehrlichman, the former domestic adviser, had been leaders of a widespread coverup of the bugging of the Democratic headquarters in June, 1972.

In his April 30 speech on Watergate, Mr. Nixon described Haldeman and Ehrlichman as "two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

A high White House official, asked why the president waited two weeks before requesting the resignations, said only that "there would be no comment at this time."

Other sources with close White House connections said, however, that Mr. Nixon had been angered and distressed by the report from Petersen, whom he had placed in charge of the Watergate inquiry one month earlier.

In the two weeks following

his meeting with Petersen and Kleindienst, the President "developed a very active policy of playing one White House aide off against another," one source said. "He was creating an environment in which the prosecution could carry out its investigation."

"When the whole story unfolds," this source added, "it will become very evident that the President used that period (between April 15 and April 30) very wisely to help the government develop evidence."

Other sources said that the three original federal prosecutors — Earl J. Silbert, Seymour Glazer and Donald E. Campbell — first learned of the alleged extensive coverup involvement of Haldeman and Ehrlichman from John W. Dean III, the former White House counsel who began talking in late March about his role.

Within days, the sources said, the prosecutors — described as being incredulous about Dean's testimony at first — developed supporting testimony from Jeb Stuart Magruder, the former White House aide who has agreed to plead guilty to coverup charges.

After more interviews and more corroborative testimony, sources said, the prosecutors informed Petersen about these findings, and the April 15 presidential meeting was scheduled.

*New York Times*