

White House Rode Herd On Huntley's 'Big Sky'

Washington

Interior Undersecretary John C. Whittaker confirmed yesterday that the White House kept an eye on a Montana land project of former television newsman Chet Huntley.

According to Senate testimony of former presidential counsel John W. Dean III, the government's role in Huntley's "Big Sky" project was seen as a bargaining chip for the popular commentator's political support. Dean turned over two October, 1971, White House memos which appear to substantiate that charge.

Whittaker, who was then a White House aide specializing in interior affairs, admitted he had called the Agriculture Department concerning an exchange of federal land sought by Huntley.

But Whittaker insisted his role was merely to obtain information, and it was never clear to him "whether anyone at the White House wanted to speed it up or slow it down."

As for himself, Whittaker said in an interview, he told the department to treat Chet Huntley like anybody else.

According to Dean, the White House had varying emotions about Huntley. At one point, "because of a rather hostile comment that Mr. Huntley had made regarding the President, there was an effort . . . to make it as difficult as possible for him to get his Big Sky project moving."

Later, he said, "there was a change of heart on Chet Huntley" and agency officials were told "they should

sign off on whatever it was he needed."

According to an October 19 memo sent to White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman by Republican party official Lyn Nofziger, Whittaker had by then "ordered the Department of Agriculture to quit dragging its heels on Big Sky."

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