

# Hickel Says Nixon The One to Blame

## Anchorage, Alaska

President Nixon is responsible for the Watergate scandals whether or not he knew about the acts in advance, in the opinion of Walter J. Hickel, the President's first secretary of interior.

"He created the atmosphere and the attitude for it to happen," Hickel said of Mr. Nixon, who dismissed him from the Cabinet in November 1970, after the former Alaska governor had criticized the bombing of Cambodia and raised questions about the moral tone of the Administration.

"I don't think the Watergate could have happened under Eisenhower," Hickel said. "He used the staff system, but he used it differently. He understood that. I don't think that I know of a Presidency in history that quite operated the way the Nixon Administration did, one that was isolated from the reality of the American public."

Hickel said that by June 1969, when he had been in Washington less than six months, events occurred in his dealings with the White House that caused him to say to an assistant, "Hey, they're playing games. This isn't right."

His remark referred to undisclosed actions of H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and Egil Krogh, then aides to the President, Hickel said. By early 1970, he said, he began to speak out in criticism of patterns he

saw develop in the presidential staff.

"I saw them circumvent what I call The System," Hickel said. "I think the system is great. Congress can call a cabinet officer down there and literally chew him up."

This gives the President a source of information on which to judge the Nation's attitudes, he said, because members of Congress are reacting to voter attitudes. But when Cabinet officers are replaced by presidential staff members as the President's main information sources, trouble is bound to occur, Hickel said.

Conflicts with the Nixon staff played a major part in his dismissal from the Cabinet, Hickel said.

In an interview conducted in his office overlooking the racing tides of Cook inlet and the mountain ranges of central Alaska, Hickel said he was happy to be back in Alaska.

He called Mr. Nixon "an introverted President" who is "analytically brilliant, non-emotional" and said that such a man "makes his decisions on input, and when that input is short-circuited, you're going to have a situation like Watergate."

Hickel said that almost from the beginning of the first Nixon Administration, the President was constantly concerned about being re-elected.

"His greatest concern was to be re-elected," Hickel recalled.

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