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Finch Gets Retraction on Health Memo

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Aug. 17 (AP)—Robert H. Finch says he has received a formal retraction of a memo circulated by a former White House colleague suggesting that Finch's health record be used against him if he runs for governor of California.

The memo said Finch may have suffered "a breakdown" while U.S. secretary of health, education and welfare.

Finch said he received the retraction, and an apology, from Charles W. Colson after threatening to sue him for libel.

"This is an admission he libeled and defamed me," said Finch, who went into law practice in Los Angeles after leaving the White House staff as a presidential counselor last December.

Finch said he probably will decide soon whether he will run for the Republican nomination for governor next year or perhaps try for the U.S. Senate from California.

Finch said Colson wrote in his retraction, sent by telegram Thursday: "I hereby retract any and all statements pertaining to or which may have adversely reflected upon you, your health, your ability to practice law or hold public office."

The telegram continued: "I would like to state affirmatively that I know from my personal knowledge when you were in the White House and your well-known reputation for hard work under pressure that there is no possible basis for the assertion made concerning your physical and or mental well being."

Finch said in a telephone interview he would make his medical records public if he runs next year. He was lieutenant governor when President Nixon chose him as his first HEW secretary.

Near the end of his tenure, at HEW, Finch was hospitalized for fatigue which "manifested itself" as a neurological impairment in his left arm. Finch has said his doctors since have assured him his health is excellent.

The memo was disclosed this week by columnist Jack Anderson, who said it was written by a White House intern-aide to Colson and passed on by Colson to current HEW Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger. The aide was not identified.

The memo said Finch's medical records would "raise Eagleton-type questions about Finch's ability to handle the job" of governor and urged Weinberger to run for governor, Anderson reported.