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Role 'Indirect,' White House Says

Buzhardt In on Agnew Talks

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The White House yesterday confirmed reports that presidential counsel J. Fred Buzhardt was involved "in an indirect way" in negotiations between Vice President Agnew's lawyers and the Justice Department.

Buzhardt was acting with the approval of President Nixon, the Vice President and Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said.

The negotiations, which have been described as plea bargaining, were unsuccessful, Richardson said last week in

announcing that he was presenting evidence against Agnew to a federal grand jury.

Warren also reported that Richardson yesterday assured the White House that Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen was not the source of leaks about Agnew, which the Vice President Saturday described as "malicious and outrageous."

After Agnew assailed Petersen Saturday in a Los Angeles speech, Richardson issued a statement defending him. Yesterday the White House counsel's office telephoned Richardson and he assured the White House that Petersen

"has not talked to the news media," Warren said.

"The attorney General said his investigation (of leaks) is still under way," Warren said. Mr. Nixon has not communicated with Richardson directly since the Vice President's speech, Warren said.

The Agnew attack against a presidential appointee and his charge that Petersen is motivated by his "ineptness" in the Watergate and other cases appeared to be almost a direct attack on the President.

But Warren repeated that "there are no strained rela-

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J. FRED BUZHARDT
... "trying to be helpful"

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tions between the President and the Vice President." No one in the White House has "pressured" the Vice President to resign, he said.

Nevertheless, Warren confirmed reports that Buzhardt played a role in the discussions between the Vice President's attorneys and Justice Department attorneys who reportedly were seeking a compromise involving the Vice President's resignation.

Newsweek magazine is saying in its current issue that Buzhardt held at least three meetings with the attorneys for the government and for Agnew "to explore the chances the Veep might accept reduction of charges or sentence in return for his resignation and guilty plea."

Warren said yesterday that Buzhardt "was trying to be helpful when desired by the Attorney General or the Vice President's attorneys in the procedures then taking place." He declined to say what the procedures were.

Warren maintained that Buzhardt was "not dictating any substantive proceeding" or advocating any substantive course of action and was not involved in direct negotiations. Buzhardt was "involved in an indirect way," he said.

When the negotiations were under way there were repeated reports, vigorously denied at the White House, that Mr. Nixon was seeking the Vice President's resignation.

As Warren described it yesterday, Buzhardt took part in the negotiations when requested to do so by either side, and he did so with the President's approval.

Declaring that it would be inappropriate for him to discuss details of the negotiations, Warren said that "too much has been said about them already," a reference to the leaks.

Agnew's attorneys have petitioned the federal district court in Baltimore to halt the grand jury investigation, and Agnew declared Saturday that he would not resign even if indicted. He charged that stories reporting that he was under investigation were leaked by federal prosecutors.

On Capitol Hill, House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) said that his decision not to seek a House inquiry as requested by the Vice President still stands.

Albert insisted that he was not politically motivated in his stand. His decision against asking for an inquiry "was based on lots of study by myself, by the Judiciary Committee and its staff, and others," he told newsmen, and "was not based on political considerations."

Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.), author of a resolution for appointment of a special committee to study whether impeachment proceedings should be begun against Agnew, made public a letter urging the speaker to reconsider his position.

If the House takes a hands-off attitude while the matter is before the courts, a cloud may hang over Agnew for several years, Findley said. Yet Agnew will be only "a heartbeat away from the presidency," Findley wrote.

On the Senate side of the Capitol, Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) defended Agnew's position on the leaks.

In a meeting with reporters, Scott said that "the massive amount of stories released about the Vice President represents an injustice to the Vice President. I'm not blaming the press; I'm not blaming anyone. But I assume someone in the government" is responsible.