

NIXON DEFENDED

Top Assistants Doubt Action in the Capitol Will Be Instituted

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 21—

Some of President Nixon's top assistants said today they were confident that Congress would not institute impeachment proceedings in the wake of his latest shake-up at the Justice Department.

Mr. Nixon ousted the special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox, last night, abolished his office, accepted the resignation of Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and discharged William D. Ruckelshaus, the Deputy Attorney General.

White House officials, publicly and privately, sought to give the President's side of the story and to counter impeachment talk in Congress.

Mr. Nixon was pictured as having yielded an enormous amount of ground in the constitutional dispute over the Watergate tape recordings but had found himself confronted by a "strident and belligerent" Mr. Cox, who left the President no choice but to dismiss him.

The White House will contend, in a written statement to be delivered to Judge John J. Sirica in United States District Court tomorrow or Tuesday, that the President's plan to give the court a "summary" of the contents of the Watergate tapes "satisfies" the judges order that Mr. Nixon turn over the tapes themselves.

Outwardly, the city was

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peaceful on a sparkling October day except for a small demonstration by perhaps 200 persons, mostly youths, who milled in front of the White House carrying such signs as "Let Nixon Wallow in Impeachment."

In the White House, the President and his staff worked through the day seeking ways to repair the latest damage to the Administration and dealing with events in the war in the Middle East.

Melvin R. Laird, counselor to the President on domestic affairs, predicted that Congress would wait to see the effects of the President's proposal for yielding some pertinent portions of the tapes before making any move for impeachment.

"I think the Congress will wait to see the product of this compromise, and, after the product is looked at, I am confident that the Congress will take a negative position as far as the question that you raise on impeachment proceedings is concerned," he said on the National Broadcasting Company television program "Meet the Press."

Mr. Laird, who frequently differs from the official White House position, said last week that he had warned the President he would face impeachment should he defy the Supreme Court on the tapes issue. But today his statements coincided with those made

privately by aides who consistently reflect Mr. Nixon's thinking.

This and other evidence indicated that the top Administration leaders who were left were closing ranks to support the President's position.

The atmosphere at the White House was somewhat grim. But there was no discernible feeling of what was felt by many outside—that the Government was on the verge of unraveling. The predominant mood was that the situation was essentially under control and that the President was enduring with equanimity another difficult episode in the Watergate troubles that have engulfed his Administration.

There was a feeling of outrage that Mr. Cox had attempted to set up a "fourth branch of government" in the Justice Department, which is under the President. As to the plan that Mr. Cox rejected, Mr. Laird said:

"I think the special prosecutor won a tremendous victory in this compromise. It is a great

victory for him. Now sometimes in this process of government, you can win victories and not demand total surrender, and I can't believe that anyone should be in a position where they demand total surrender."

Although Mr. Laird said he would not attempt to prejudge what Congress would do, he said he did not believe there would be a successful move to set up a special prosecutor to take the place of Mr. Cox.

For some time, the Nixon White House has been unhappy that the special prosecutor office was set up. The Senate, in a sense, forced it on Mr. Richardson as the price for his confirmation and the President was said to be agreeable as long as Mr. Cox was prosecuting the case without trying to obtain the President's private communications.

But after the struggle for the tapes began, the feeling of the President was that the establishment of the office had been a mistake.