

Congress critical on Watergate plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A new burst of Democratic criticism has greeted President Nixon's latest attempt to quell the Watergate turmoil.

Many members of Congress, commenting after the President's news conference last night, credited Nixon with diplomatic success in reducing tensions in the Middle East but said he failed to end suspicions about his willingness to permit a complete and independent Watergate investigation.

Others complained of a new attack by the President on the news media in general and television reporting and commentary in particular. Still others had specific suggestions.

Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford suggested the President name former Attorney General Elliot Richardson to replace Archibald Cox as special prosecutor.

Richardson resigned last Saturday after refusing a presidential order to fire Cox.

Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), vice chairman of the Senate Watergate committee, suggested a "duo special prosecutor" be named.

"Two special prosecutors

could be named — one by the President and one by Congress, one a Democrat and one a Republican — both of whom could not be fired without congressional consent," Baker said.

"I'm glad the President has agreed to name a special prosecutor. It should be done under such arrangements to assure total independence," remarked Senate Republican Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania.

Fifty-three senators, including seven Republicans, are sponsoring legislation to authorize U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica to name a special prosecutor independent of both the White House and Congress.

Many of those senators, reached for comment after the news conference, said they saw no reason to stop that effort.

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) said Nixon tried to divert the public by a slashing and unjustified attack on the news media. "The people need to be assured that he will not use his powers to block the truth," Muskie said. "He did not give us that reassurance tonight."

"The President's definition of independence means either accept his offered compromise or be fired," said Rep. John Culver (D-Iowa),

one of the 102 House co-sponsors of the bill authorizing Sirica to name a prosecutor.

Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.), chairman of the Watergate committee, said he believes the Senate will pass a bill introduced earlier in the day for Congress to choose a special prosecutor who would be responsible to Sirica.

Sirica yesterday took control of Cox's files to protect them from outsiders.

Acting Attorney General Robert Bork said he has submitted five or six names for White House consideration as Cox's successor. He said all have prosecutorial experience and none currently is in government.

Presumably the White House would seek agreement from the appointee that he would not initiate any court battles to subpoena presidential documents. However, Bork said he did not think anyone "with a reputation to maintain is going to take the job unless he has as much of a guarantee of his freedom as is possible."

Remaining open was the possibility that Congress might reject Nixon's plan to name a new prosecutor who would be an employee of the executive branch. A majority of the Senate joined ves-

terday in sponsoring legislation that would mandate Sirica to appoint a prosecutor who would be independent of both the Congress and the White House.

Nixon suggested Congress would abandon the measure.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield today said "no soap" to Nixon's plan. Mansfield said he will support legislation introduced before Nixon's news conference which would direct the courts to name an independent Watergate prosecutor who could not be fired by the President.

"It has to be a special prosecutor who had the same kind of authority Archibald Cox had," Mansfield told a news conference.

House Democratic Leader Thomas P. O'Neill said in a statement: "I do not believe the new prosecutor will be acceptable to the Congress and the American public under the terms the President outlined."