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Nixon almost alone in ring of

By Robert Boyd
Knight news service

WASHINGTON — Richard M. Nixon is enduring the worst ordeal of his life in the way he apparently wants it — almost alone.

During the hellish month of October, which brought his presidency to the brink of ruin, Nixon has discussed his problems with virtually nobody outside a tight inner ring of advisers.

Day after day, his spokesman reported he was seeing the same little group — Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, White House Staff Chief Alexander Haig, Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler, and Personal Secretary

Rose Mary Wood — none of whom have broad political experience.

The President also spent a great deal of time with his lawyers, chiefly Fred Buzhardt, and considerably less time with the experienced political counselors he brought in to help when the Watergate crisis broke last spring — Melvin Laird and Bryce Harlow.

He had one cabinet meeting, on Oct. 18, but most of that was spent discussing economic matters instead of the three crises that shook his administration to the core: the resignation under fire of Vice President Agnew, the Mideast War, and the "Saturday Night Massa-

cre" that ousted Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, Attorney General Elliott Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus.

He met several times with Congressional leaders, but only to inform them of what he had already decided to do, one leader said.

"He doesn't want our advice," an aide to a top Republican senator said. "He won't listen. The last man who tried to give him advice was John Connally — and you know how long he lasted."

There was one apparent effort — a consultation — before the selection of Rep.

Gerald Ford to replace Agnew — but that was a charade.

The White House announced an elaborate survey of "national leaders inside and outside the administration" on the vice presidency.

"The decision was not made that way," Laird explained later. The survey was just to give Republicans "a feeling of participation."

In fact, Nixon picked Ford all by himself after a solitary night of reflection on the mountaintop at Camp David, Md.

Significantly, Laird said, Ford was chosen not because he was the best quali-

fied Republican for the job, but because Nixon felt "comfortable" with him and knew he could count on Ford's loyalty.

The Ford choice wasn't Nixon's only lonesome decision.

His order placing America's nuclear force and half a million troops on alert in the Mideast Crisis was made after consultation with just four men — Kissinger, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, CIA Director William Colby, and Admiral Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Congressional Republicans have complained that the President's self-imposed isolation has led him into serious blunders.

Top White House officials conceded, for example, that they badly miscalculated the reaction to the Cox firing.

One Presidential aide, Patrick Buchanan, said Nixon told him the morning Richardson quit that the Attorney General was "still on board." The President didn't talk to Richardson face-to-face until that afternoon, a few hours before he handed in his resignation rather than fire Cox.

Not content with the privacy of the White House, Nixon repeatedly escaped to the even deeper solitude of Camp David.

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