

ZIEGLER ASSAILS

JAWORSKI STAFF

Nixon Aide Charges It Has Shown 'Visceral Dislike for This Administration'

By R. W. APPLE Jr.

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 29

The White House bitterly attacked the staff of the special Watergate prosecutor today, charging that it has displayed an "ingrained suspicion and visceral dislike for this President and this Administration."

Ronald L. Ziegler, the Presidential press secretary, who has emerged in recent weeks as one of Mr. Nixon's three closest advisers, described Leon Jaworski, the prosecutor, as "a very respected man, a very fair man." But he added:

"I have very serious questions about the staff of the special prosecutor's office, though, in political terms."

Mr. Ziegler, briefing the press because of the illness of his deputy, Gerald L. Warren, also appeared to signal a decline in the status of J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., the special White House counsel who has been handling the Watergate case.

Meanwhile, Mr. Buzhardt

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conceded today, to Judge John J. Sirica that the official White House explanation of the 18-minute gap in a Watergate tape recording was not a certainty but, instead, "just a possibility."

Asked whether the President was dissatisfied with Mr. Buzhardt's work, Mr. Ziegler replied obliquely, remarking that he did not want to express "dissatisfaction with the performance of any individual." At another point, he said that he did not want to leave the impression that he was "cutting his [Buzhardt's] legs off."

But Mr. Ziegler said the White House legal staff had been carrying a very heavy work load that led "to some mistakes." He mentioned as an example the staff's failure to discover until Nov. 14 exactly which Watergate tapes had been subpoenaed months earlier.

Asked by newsmen about reports that he was being taken off the case, Mr. Buzhardt said, "Nobody has told me." Asked about Mr. Ziegler's comment about "mistakes," the lawyer said, "I've never pretended I

was perfect."

Another White House official said that he expected Mr. Buzhardt to remain on the Watergate case for the time being.

Asked specifically whether Mr. Buzhardt would remain in charge of the Watergate case, Mr. Ziegler would say only that lawyer would "continue to work on it, continue to play a key role." Mr. Buzhardt would himself want to delegate some of the responsibility, the press secretary suggested.

To those familiar with the Washington political code, Mr. Ziegler's veiled remarks seemed to add up to a demotion for Mr. Buzhardt. And other White House sources said control of the case was expected to pass in the next few days to Judge John J. Sullivan of the Illinois Appellate Court, a 59-year-old Democrat who has known Mr. Nixon since his Navy days. Judge Sullivan is already working at the Executive Office Building.

Mr. Sullivan was identified by Mr. Ziegler as one of the members of an informal working group that is assembling a series of statements on such questions as acquisition of Mr. Nixon's homes, the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation case, the President's taxes, and so on. These are to be distributed, beginning next week, to members of Congress, the press and other opinion leaders, Mr. Ziegler disclosed.

Members of Group

Mr. Ziegler said that, in addition to Judge Sullivan and the White House counsel's office, headed by Leonard Garment, the other members of the group are the following: H. Chapman Rose of Cleveland and Kenneth Gemmill of Philadelphia, prominent lawyers who have volunteered their time, with no compensation, to help Mr. Nixon; Mr. Ziegler himself, and David Gergen, head of the White House speech-writing office since the promotion of Raymond K. Price Jr.

Neither Mr. Ziegler nor Melvin R. Laird, a Presidential counselor, who met with reporters separately, would promise that Mr. Nixon's tax returns for 1970 and 1971—when he paid only "nominal" taxes—would be made public. They said that "full information" would be provided.

Mr. Laird said he expected Mr. Nixon to withhold some data, such as the amounts of his charitable contributions.

The former Defense Secretary also said that recent revelations about a gap in one of the Watergate tapes had undercut the President's Operation Candor to some unmeasurable degree. But he predicted, as he often has in the past, that Mr. Nixon would nevertheless survive the Watergate crisis.

Mr. Ziegler's remarks about the prosecutorial staff followed complaints earlier this week from Mr. Karren about alleged leaks from that staff, and reflected continuing White House bitterness about the liberal Democratic politics of the team originally assembled by Archibald Cox, the first special prosecutor, who was dismissed.

They appeared to suggest

trouble ahead between the White House and Mr. Jaworski, because he has made it clear that he trusts and admires the lawyers he inherited from Mr. Cox.

That point came up at the briefing this morning, when a reporter, noting that Mr. Ziegler seemed to be trying to dissociate Mr. Jaworski from his staff, remarked that Mr. Jaworski "has spoken kindly" of his associates.

"Well, I speak unkindly of them," Mr. Ziegler replied.

Mr. Ziegler rejected Mr. Jaworski's suggestion that all the White House tapes be turned over the courts for safekeeping to prevent further mishaps, terming the suggestion "nonsense."

He said that the White House had argued all along that if it provided any of the tapes and other confidential materials, it would simply lead to demands that would "ravag" the files.

Laird Plans to Resign

WASHINGTON, Nov. 29 (UPI)—Mr. Laird said today that he planned to resign as President Nixon's chief domestic adviser after Representative Gerald R. Ford gets final Congressional approval and assumes the Vice Presidency.

Mr. Laird, Secretary of Defense throughout Mr. Nixon's first Administration, agreed to take his present position last spring following the resignation of John D. Ehrlichman and other top White House aides as a result of the Watergate scandal.

Questioned about recurring rumors that he was planning to quit his White House position, Mr. Laird said he thought it would be best to leave once Mr. Ford becomes vice president.

"The work that I'm doing and my responsibilities can be done better by Jerry Ford as Vice President than by me and I think Jerry Ford should be an active Vice President," he said.