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Travel Plans of Nixon Upset the Press

By MARTIN ARNOLD

The White House's handling of President Nixon's on-again, off-again trip to Florida next week has further complicated the President's already uneasy relationship with the press.

On Tuesday, the President said that because of the fuel shortage, he had ordered that no press plane be chartered by the White House for the trip.

This decision could mean that for the duration of the fuel crisis that the 70 or so correspondents who normally cover the President's activities would have their work seriously curtailed.

Further, Mr. Nixon's indecision has sent the White House press corps scurrying for hotel space in the tourist-crowded Miami area.

While all this sounds intramural, it means that the close personal watch that the American press traditionally keeps over any President will be seriously ruptured, reporters believe.

The White House has denied that the President was acting in pique, but for years the White House transportation office has chartered buses and planes for the press and reserved blocks of rooms for it on Presidential trips. This has been done to permit the press to be as close as possible to the President in the event of an emergency. The news media paid the cost of these arrangements.

For the time being at least, all that has apparently been done away with.

Washington of Key Biscayne? First, the President was going to Key Biscayne, but then came the fuel crisis. To save the Air Force fuel, he hinted that he would stay in Washington.

Next the President indicated that he could still go to Florida and save the Air Force fuel. The report from Washington was that he might instead take a train.

Yesterday, the word from the White House was that a train was out. It involves too much preparation, too much fuel, a special engine and special routing.

A day before the President hinted that he would stay in Washington for Christmas. He was quoted as telling several reporters: "You're going to stay here with me and freeze. Some-

body has to set an example, and it's going to be me."

He made that remark at about the moment that Vice President Ford was saying that he planned to use an Air Force jet to take him and his family to Colorado for Christmas, and in the presence of William E. Simon, the Federal energy chief, who had hinted earlier that he believed both men should stay in Washington for the holiday.

By yesterday, despite Mr. Nixon's comment, the White House was still declining to say whether or not the President would stay in Washington or go to Florida. It did say that if he went, it would be in a small Air Force jet, which carries from 10 to 18 persons.

"No 'pool' press will be allowed on that plane, the White House said. Usually when the President makes a trip on Air Force One a pool of at least seven reporters, cameramen and television technicians fly on the plane with him. The remainder of the White House press corps goes in a backup plane, paying on a pro-rata basis. All arrangements are made by the White House.

The "pool" press then reports to the rest of the press what occurred on the Presidential plane.

Were Services Seek Answer

Always the Associated Press and United Press International, the nation's two largest news wire services, are among the pool press. Much of the news that appears in most of the newspapers in the United States and on television and radio is supplied by one or both of those services.

On Thursday, representatives of each asked for a meeting with Ronald Ziegler, the President's press secretary, to see if the Florida trip was on or off. As of last night, Mr. Ziegler had declined to have the meeting.

The White House did, however, ask the Four Ambassadors Hotel in Miami—five miles or so from the President's home—to reserve 30 rooms for reporters, but those rooms were not enough.

The reporters who cover the White House regularly generally agree that there are two reasons Mr. Nixon is acting so

singularly about his Christmas plans.

They theorize that he is so concerned about his image with the public, that he can not make up his mind whether or not to go and also that he likes to play cat and mouse with the press.

Only once before during the Nixon Presidency has the President flown off and left the "pool" press behind. That was in October when he flew to Key Biscayne.