

More Lawyers for Nixon's Defense



Jack Anderson

THE WHITE HOUSE is raiding the Justice Department for more lawyers to bail President Nixon out of his Watergate troubles.

Although platoons of attorneys are already working on the President's problems with taxes, impeachment, the Senate Watergate committee and the special prosecutor, our sources say the White House has asked for "at least a dozen" lawyers from Justice.

These lawyers, of course, are being pulled off important cases at Justice to assist the President at the expense of the taxpayers. Some top Justice officials are giving the White House names of prospects, but there is also an undercurrent of resistance to the presidential dragooning.

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FOR EXAMPLE. Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen, whose criminal division handled the early Watergate investigation, has been privately hinting to aides that they would be wise to turn down the White House.

From bitter experience, Petersen knows that getting too close to President Nixon can mean political burns. At Mr. Nixon's request, he postponed acting on crucial Watergate information, and took a public roasting for it.

Petersen is also worried, say insiders, about possible conflicts of interest. Justice

lawyers themselves have confided to us that they are leery of taking the jobs at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue not just out of personal distaste, but because of ethical conflicts. One young antitrust lawyer sent for a job interview with Nixon attorney James St. Clair had worked on the milk fund case while at Justice.

Other lawyers fear they will be doing "clerk and jerk" jobs at the White House, reviewing other lawyers' work and "jerk-ing" files and books from law libraries.

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THE WHITE HOUSE'S difficulty in wooing young Justice lawyers was obliquely conceded by St. Clair in an interview with my associate Bob Owens.

St. Clair said he is "in the process" of hiring two or three attorneys from Justice. But the talent search has been going on for weeks, ample time to snare more than two or three attorneys if career lawyers were volunteering.

When Owens asked St. Clair who was going to pay the Justice attorneys, the shrewd Bostonian dodged. "I work at a disadvantage because I don't understand the bureaucracy," he said. The payroll, he added, has been left to "smarter people."

At Justice, a spokesman said when the loaned lawyers leave the department, they will also go off the department payroll. This would put them into the White House budget.