

White House Staff Aides Are Dismayed and Adrift

8-8-74
NYT

By PHILIP SHABECOFF
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 —

White House staff members, from secretaries to officials close to the center of power, admitted today being dismayed and adrift as Richard Nixon's Presidency apparently moved toward its conclusion.

"Everybody is rattled," Kenneth R. Cole, director of the President's Domestic Council, told reporters.

Mr. Cole said he and others in the White House were carrying on their normal work out of a sense of "obligation" not only to the President but also to the American people.

But many members of the White House staff were wondering out loud today about where they would find the next job and how they would earn a living when President Nixon, as they expected, stepped down from his high office.

The head of one White House department said he was not worried about his job because he would rather leave anyway. But he added that most of the workers of his staff were concerned about finding new jobs if when Mr. Nixon left.

Fear of Being 'Tarnished'

One official talked about job "feelers" he had received but expressed the fear that he might be "tarnished" by his employment in the White House.

Despite official disclaimers by the President's spokesmen, a number of staff officials said today that they expected Mr. Nixon to resign before he came to trial in the Senate.

"He can no longer govern the country," said one official who has a policy role. His comment was echoed by several other staff members.

But uncertainly rather than anticipation of the President's imminent departure was the dominant mood in the White House.

Despite official disclaimers by the President's spokesmen, a number of staff officials said today that they expected Mr. Nixon to resign before he came to trial in the Senate.

"He can no longer govern the country," said one official who has a policy role. His comment was echoed by several other staff members.

But uncertainly rather than anticipation of the President's imminent departure was the dominant mood in the White House.

One man who attended yesterday's Cabinet meeting with the President said today that he emerged from that meeting convinced that Mr. Nixon would see the impeachment and conviction process through to its end.

However, he added that he had talked afterward to a Cabinet officer who took a totally different impression out of the meeting—that the President would soon resign.

The White House director of

communications, Ken W. Clawson, said in an interview today that he and his staff were operating on the assumption that the President would stand trial in the Senate.

Action Uncertain

But Mr. Clawson added, "I don't know what to do right now."

He explained that he had been making plans in expectation of an impeachment fight in the House. When the President issued his statement Monday admitting he had tried to halt an investigation of the Watergate burglary, "zap—that put a halt to that phase," Mr. Clawson said.

He added that he did not know how to proceed with a communications program directed toward Congress and the public because the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, and his staff had not devised a defense for Mr. Nixon should he be tried by the Senate.

Speaking for himself, Mr. Clawson said, "I came here because of Richard M. Nixon and I will stay here because of him—as long as he wants me here."

There was a tone of elegy even in casual conversation around the White House today. In the old Executive Office Building wing, quiet and unusually empty today, a young secretary who has been work-

ing for the Government only a few months murmured, "It's all very said."

In another office, dealing with matters far removed from impeachment, a secretary said brightly, "We keep our spirits up by working very hard."

Routine Seems Unreal

The White House kept up its normal routine today, but as speculation about Mr. Nixon's possible resignation spread, these efforts seemed somehow slightly unreal. For example, the Deputy press secretary, Gerald L. Warrtn, opened his regular news briefing, which was inevitably to be concerned almost exclusively with the crisis of the Presidency, with a series of announcements about such things as Mr. Nixon proclaiming National Student Government Day, the reappointment of the vice chairman of the Tariff Commission and the new Department of Justice budget.

The lines of tourists waiting to enter the White House were much longer than usual today. On Pennsylvania Avenue, passers-by paused and stared through the iron fence as if expecting to see the future of Mr. Nixon's Presidency made physically manifest in some way.

Many members of the White House staff learned that the President was going to admit a role in trying to cover up the Watergate scandal when they were briefed on Monday by Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., Mr. Nixon's chief of staff. Gen-

eral Haig broke the news to about 100 staff members just before the President issued his statement. General Haig warned that the statement would cause a great furor.

Mr. Cole, who was among the group, said he had reacted "with amazement and dismay."

"Obviously, you don't feel very good about it," he said at a breakfast meeting with reporters today. But he added that he and others in the Government must continue to perform their jobs as long as they could.

Mr. Cole did not see the President. Neither did any other White House staff members except his office personnel—General Haig, Ronald L. Ziegler and perhaps William E. Simmons, the White House liaison with Congress—Mr. Warrtn reported.