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Ford Denies Post Story On Pardon

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President Ford stands by his public statements and testimony about the events leading up to the pardon of former President Nixon, a White House spokesman said yesterday.

William I. Greener said "the President has dealt with candor and truthfulness at all times on this matter."

Greener denied a story in yesterday's Washington Post that President Ford assured former Nixon chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. on Aug. 28, 1974, that a pardon for Nixon would be forthcoming.

This was 10 days before President Ford announced the pardon.

It was learned from other White House sources, meanwhile, that President Ford failed to tell his own staff about his discussions with Haig regarding a pardon, and that — until questioned by reporters this week — Mr. Ford's top advisers were unaware that such conversations took place.

Had they known of the existence of such conversations, these sources said, they would have advised Mr. Ford to disclose them when he testified before a congressional subcommittee last year.

On Capitol Hill, meanwhile, Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. of the House Judiciary Committee directed a review of President Ford's testimony about the pardon, to determine if a subcommittee should reopen hearings into the matter.

According to Greener, Mr. Ford and Haig did discuss the pardon question on Aug. 28, 1974, but only in the context of answers to questions about a possible pardon that Mr. Ford gave at his press conference that day.

Three reliable sources have told The Washington Post that the President and Haig had a substantive discussion that day about pardoning Nixon, and that Haig received assurances from Mr. Ford that a pardon would be granted.

In addition, both Haig and

See PRESIDENT, A4, Col. 5

PRESIDENT, From A1

White House Counsel Philip W. Buchen said earlier this week that the general and the President had such a substantive discussion that day.

Haig has refused to discuss publicly what was said at his meeting with the President. Buchen has said that he doesn't know exactly what was discussed by the two men.

The existence of the Aug. 28 discussion appears to contradict Mr. Ford's testimony before a House Judiciary subcommittee on Oct. 17, 1974, when he said:

"At no time after I became President on Aug. 9, 1974, was the subject of a pardon for Richard M. Nixon raised by the former President or by anyone representing him."

Greener denied yesterday that there was any contradiction. At the White House press briefing yesterday there seemed to be some question whether Haig, who was acting chief of staff for Mr. Ford at the time, was technically "representing" former President Nixon.

In a telephone interview Wednesday, Haig — now commander of NATO forces in Europe — confirmed that he discussed the pardon with Mr. Ford on Aug. 28. "That's accurate," Haig said when told that Buchen had acknowledged such a conversation.

A report in The New York Times nine days after the pardon said that Haig had played a key role in obtaining the pardon. Haig denied this at the time.

In reaction to the Post story, Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.) called yesterday for additional hearings by the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Criminal Justice into the pardon.

In a letter to subcommittee

Chairman William Hungate (D-Mo.), Holtzman raised "the possibility that President Ford concealed important information" when he testified before the subcommittee on Oct. 17, 1974.

Rodino met yesterday with Hungate and directed the Judiciary Committee staff to begin a full review of the President's testimony "to determine whether that record needs to be supplemented in any fashion."

Rodino indicated that a decision will be made sometime in January on whether to reopen hearings into the pardon and the President's testimony.

In her letter, Holtzman said that the Post report "if true . . . indicates that President Ford was not candid about the facts surrounding his decision to issue the pardon."

The letter noted that one of two congressional resolutions calling for the President's testimony asked that he provide "the full and complete information and facts upon" which the pardon decision was based.

Another resolution, she added, requested "any information or facts presented to the President with respect to the mental or physical health of Richard M. Nixon."

Haig cited Nixon's emotional and physical state as a reason for granting him a pardon, sources said.