

NY Times 1/25/77

ASSASSINATION PANEL FACING BUDGET TRIM

House Majority Leader Predicts
Inquiry Will Be Continued, but
Not With 'Grandiose' Funds

By DAVID BURNHAM

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 24—Representative Jim Wright, the House majority leader, predicted today that the House Assassination Committee would be continued but that its budget would be "considerably curbed below the grandiose figures that have been bandied about."

Mr. Wright added that Representative Henry B. Gonzalez, the Texas Democrat in line to be the committee's chairman, would have to get the "reins in his hands," curb what he called the "voracious appetite" of some of the staff and guarantee that the investigating tactics and techniques of the committee would not "impinge on basic human rights."

Mr. Wright, also a Texas Democrat, made his comments at a luncheon with reporters and editors of The New York Times one day before a resolution to re-establish the committee was scheduled to come before the House Rules Committee.

Criticism of Sprague

The majority leader further said that he personally did not believe that the committee would turn up any significant new information, although he said a minority of the House felt that the investigation was needed. "But I'm not going to vote for \$6.5 million," Mr. Wright said, referring to the committee's proposed budget for the first year.

Mr. Wright's criticism of the committee's tactics referred to the initial plan of Richard A. Sprague, the committee's chief counsel and director, to use tiny hidden radios and psychological stress

who heads the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, the committee earlier announced that it would not use the stress evaluators.

But the record and activities of Mr. Sprague, a former first assistant district attorney from Philadelphia, has been one factor in the increasing Congressional concern about the proposed investigation of the assassinations of President Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

A new controversy involving Mr. Sprague has come to light concerning his report a little more than three years ago that he had not found sufficient evidence of corruption to recommend the establishment of a special grand jury while he was serving as a special prosecutor in a county near Philadelphia.

Deputy Attorney General Disagreed

Ten months later, a special deputy attorney general in Pennsylvania said in a confidential report that there were indications of extortion, bribery, election fraud, bid rigging and related crime in the same county, and recommended the appointment of an independent prosecutor and grand jury.

Although the Attorney General of Pennsylvania, Robert P. Kane, did not act on the report of his special deputy, Walter M. Phillips Jr., a string of reports of corruption in Delaware County by the State Crime Commission and an ongoing Federal investigation of political corruption there provided at least some support to the conclusion of the Phillips report.

Mr. Sprague, in response to an inquiry, said the only real difference between the two reports was the legal judgement "that I did not feel there was sufficient evidence to meet the legal requirement for creating an investigating grand jury and Mr. Phillips felt there was."

Mr. Sprague also said the two reports were not contemporaneous because most of his investigation of Delaware County had been completed two years before his report was made public in the fall of 1974.

Accompanied by two committee staff officials during an interview, Mr. Sprague also strongly criticized The New York Times for publishing an article that cited a number of occasions in which the Pennsylvania Crime Commission, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and a report prepared by the Philadelphia Crime Commission had criticized several of his official actions while serving as the first assistant district attorney of Philadelphia.

Mr. Sprague charged that the article had not been a "fair presentation" and "obviously was intended to smear me."

Don Edwards, the California Democrat