

Economy Now No. 1 Issue

Hearing End Urged

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By Lawrence Meyer

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The Senate Watergate Committee hearings will resume in about two weeks under pressure from the Senate and constituents to bring them to an end by Nov. 1, according to sources close to the committee.

Although firm decisions have not been made and will not be made until the committee meets in executive session on Sept. 11, a tentative outline has emerged concerning the remaining, waning days of the Watergate hearings.

Interviews with members of the committee and its staff indicate that the hearings will resume about Sept. 18, that the seven-member committee will probably remain together rather than split up to conduct the final two phases of its public sessions, and that Nov. 1 is regarded as the "target date" for concluding the hearings.

As originally conceived, the hearings were broken into three phases: the Watergate break-in and the subsequent cover-up, espionage and sabotage—so-called "dirty tricks"—during the 1972 campaign, and campaign financing.

Although that plan will be followed in completing the hearings, a consensus appears to have developed among members of the committee and its principal

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Hill Feels U.S. Pulse

By Spencer Rich and Richard L. Lyons

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Members of Congress, returning from their home states yesterday after a month-long recess, said inflation is by far the top issue among their constituents, outdistancing the Watergate scandal by a big margin.

"The economy is the overriding issue," said Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.). "America's pride has been hurt by Watergate . . . but the economy is the overriding issue."

"The high cost of living is the biggest issue," said Rep. Sam Gibbons (D-Fla.).

"Pocketbook issues, the cost of living are the biggest issues," said Rep. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.), chairman of the House Republican Conference.

"Inflation, No. 1 and Watergate No. 2," said Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.).

"The biggest issues are first and foremost prices, secondly the Watergate matter," said Senate Republican Whip Robert P. Griffin (R-Mich.).

These statements, from men who represent both political parties and a wide range of policy views, reflect the consensus of dozens of Congress members interviewed yesterday as the House and Senate reconvened after a month-long holiday.

A handful of members—like Sens. Milton R. Young (R-N.D.), Walter Mondale (D-

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Minn.), Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) and Mike Gravel (D-Alaska)—said they had found the Watergate scandal to be of equal or greater concern to constituents than inflation and economic problems.

But most of those interviewed said that in travels through their states they had found inflation to be way out in front as a matter of deep concern, with Watergate not even as high as second place in many areas. Others said they found people getting tired of the Watergate issue and anxious to have Congress put it aside to tackle other matters.

Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.) moved yesterday to do just that. Urging Congress to turn its attention to inflation and other problems, the former GOP national chairman introduced a resolution providing that if the Senate's Watergate hearings do continue, they should be closed to the public and the news media.

"It should be remembered that the purpose of the hearings is to serve legislative interests," he said. "It is not to try, convict and sentence Richard Nixon.

"It is time to put on the brakes," he added. "It is time to turn off the TV lights."

Both Senate Democratic leaders unhesitatingly put economic problems in first place as an issue of concern to people in their states.

Asked what were the chief issues in his state, Montana, Majority Leader Mike Mans-

field first listed "inflation, beef, forest and grass fires, drought, Watergate, energy and strip-mining," but then emphasized that "inflation primarily . . . and Watergate" were the two biggest.

Majority Whip Robert C. Byrd (W.Va.) said "economics, high prices, the shortage of foodstuffs, high interest rates" held first place in his state, energy problems second place and "Watergate's on down the line."

Inflation was also listed as the major issue of concern by House GOP Leader Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.) and the powerful chairmen of the House and Senate appropriations committees, Rep. George H. Mahon (D-Texas) and Sen. John L. McClellan (D-Ark.).

Mahon added, "People are tired of Watergate. All have made up their minds what they think." McClellan said inflation and the fuel shortage were the key issues, with Watergate third. "I think people deplore what has happened but they are anxious to get Watergate behind us and move on," he said.

Several members, however, listed Watergate as the chief issue or as on an equal footing with inflation in their states or districts.

"Watergate is still a problem and a lot of good Republicans aren't satisfied with all the answers," said Sen. Milton R. Young (R-N.D.) "Another is inflation, but of course, times are good out there—it's mostly an agricultural state."

Sen. Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) said, "Perhaps it's because I'm known as a Democrat . . . but I'm not one who found people feeling Watergate should be put on the back burner or dismissed. Sure they talk of prices, trade balances but not with the same overriding concern as the discovery that people in high positions thought they had the right to suspend the constitution . . . They do expect every politician to understand that he is subject to the law just like everyone else."

These views, however, were in the minority.

Several senators, who asked not to be named, said that despite the apparent decrease in constituent interest in the Watergate, a presidential refusal to obey a direct supreme court order to turn over the White House tapes to congress or investigative agencies would enormously inflate capitol hill feeling and could easily bring on impeachment.

"He's got to obey the courts," said one GOP senator. "I don't think there's any serious question of impeachment now, but if he defied the courts, he'd be impeached."

Watergate Hearings May Be Ended Nov. 1

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staff members that the testimony will not be as exhaustively detailed as it was during the first phase.

Chief committee counsel Samuel Dash said yesterday that the committee will examine the "essential highlights" of the evidence gathered by the committee staff during the final two phases.

If committee members entertained any thoughts of continuing the hearings for any length of time, pressure from several sources are forcing them to end their sessions as quickly as possible.

The grueling five-day-a-week hearing schedule the committee imposed on itself in July left the members with little time or energy for other work. Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), the committee's vice chairman, said yesterday that the hearings "undoubtedly" kept him from doing other work.

A second source of pressure comes from the Senate itself. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) said on the CBS television program "Face the Nation" on Aug. 26 that "I'd like to see these hearings concluded by mid-October or the first of November at the latest."

One source close to the committee said that Mansfield's remarks indicated there would be resistance concerning continued funding if the committee sought to extend the hearing beyond Nov. 1. The Senate already has appropriated \$1 million for the committee, funds which this source said would run out by the end of October.

"The senators are members of a peer group," this source said. "They're being kidded by their colleagues, who tell them, 'We hope you wind this up.'" Although Baker said he thought these comments from other senators were not to be taken seriously, this

source said, "These senators have been in the limelight for a long, long time. They're simply getting a little edgy about being told they're show men."

The third source of pressure comes from constituents, Baker said that message, in different forms, has come to him from all over Tennessee. "If I had to synthesize it, I would say people are sort of tired of it, they're sort of made up their minds. They don't want us to drop it, stop it, but would you please finish it," said Baker.

Members of the Senate staffs of the committee members said that hometown constituents have expressed mixed reaction—constituents expressing pleasure with the performance of their senator, coupled with suggestions that the hearings be terminated quickly.

"The American people don't want to hear bad news for too long," one aide concluded after a trip back to his home state.

One source close to the committee said that the seven senators began feeling these pressures "even be-

fore they left town" after the hearings recessed Aug. 7.

The committee still has several witnesses to hear, including former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson and Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., before the first phase of hearings is completed.

Whether or not the hearings will be carried live by network television has not been decided yet. Spokesmen for the three commercial networks and for the Public Broadcasting System said yesterday that they are waiting to see who testifies and whether the committee breaks into two subcommittees before deciding how they will cover the hearings.

Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) predicted in an interview yesterday on CBS

Radio's "Capitol Cloakroom" that the vote on whether to break into subcommittees would be close when the committee meets next Tuesday.

One of the early supporters of breaking into subcommittees, Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.), now is reportedly having second thoughts about the idea, which committee chairman Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) is understood to oppose.

Talmadge reportedly favored the idea initially because he thought it would speed up the hearings. One source close to the committee said, however, that breaking into subcommittees would actually slow the hearings down and diffuse the efforts of a staff already immersed in legal attempts to secure the tapes of President Nixon's conversations with former White House counsel John W. Dean III.

Baker, however, said yesterday that he thought were the hearings would conclude by Nov. 1 only if the committee were divided into subcommittees.

Although news stories after the recess speculated that the committee could be more deliberative in its final two phases, those interviewed indicated a contrary view. Baker said he thought the committee would be "less meticulous than we've been before" since the subject matter to be examined was less complicated and "less spectacular" than the first phase testimony, which had to be "carefully examined."

Dash said that the hearings would be thorough but not "exhaustive . . . If we did an exhaustive job, we could be there for a year."

Although Dash declined to say which of the three phases he considered the most important, he said the final two phases present the "greatest challenge of legal creativity for the committee . . . to survey what was alleged to have occurred in the campaign and to determine what's foul and what's fair.

"This is kind of in activities without stopping to consider what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. This particular campaign may present an opportunity to look at a campaign and set guidelines."