

St. Clair Claims Tapes Prove Nixon Clear Of Hush Fund

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Nixon's chief lawyer indicated Sunday he believes the House impeachment - inquiry hinges on whether the President approved hush money payments to Watergate defendants. And the presidential tape transcripts released last week,

said attorney James St. Clair, prove that Nixon "neither authorized . . . nor knew" about such a payment.

Both St. Clair and White House Chief of Staff Alexander M. Haig Jr., appearing separately on televised interview programs, predicted that Nixon

would be vindicated in the House.

Haig said the edited transcripts were published by the President "to convince the American people for the first time that he had nothing to hide."

St. Clair insisted the tapes make it clear Nixon rejected, in a March 21, 1973, conversation with John W. Dean III, the demands for money from Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt.

Yet, there are several apparent contradictions on that issue in a reading of that transcript.

When Dean tells Nixon that such demands may eventually reach \$1 million, Nixon replies: "We could get that. On the money, if you need the money you could get that."

Moments later, the President says: "But in the end, we are going to be bled to death . . . and in effect look like a cover-up. So that we can't do."

Later yet, the topic turns to a specific demand from Hunt for \$120,000. Nixon: "Would you agree that that's the prime thing that you damn well better get that done?"

A month later, on April 17, Nixon and H. R. (Bob) Halde-
man are trying to recall the March 21 discussion. Nixon says: "I didn't tell him to go

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get the money, did I?" Halde-
man responds: "No."

St. Clair, who appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press," said that in releasing the transcripts, Nixon felt he had given the House Judiciary Committee everything he thinks they need.

St. Clair will represent the President in proceedings expected to begin this week in the panel's impeachment inquiry.

Haig, who appeared on ABC's "Issues and Answers," would not reply directly to questions about whether the White House would also turn over evidence sought on such issues not directly connected with Watergate as the milk fund and ITT cases.

On another program, two members of the House Judiciary Committee warned against interpreting the committee's party-line vote on transcripts as a sign of a partisan split on the impeachment issue.

After receiving edited transcripts from the White House instead of the actual tape recordings, the committee voted 20 to 18 last week to inform President Nixon he had not complied with its subpoena.