

# Request for Ford Probe Rejected After 1 Interview

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WASHINGTON—Justice Department officials said Wednesday that they had interviewed only one potential witness before rejecting a plea from two congressional Democrats last week to investigate President Ford's role in an early Watergate probe.

The potential witness, Richard K. Cook, a former White House lobbyist, reportedly denied accusations that he had approached Ford about blocking a 1972 congressional inquiry into Watergate finances.

But Cook was not placed under oath, and neither his accuser—former presidential counsel John W. Dean III—nor Cook's superior at the time, William E. Timmons, was interviewed by the department, officials said.

In rejecting an inquiry into Ford's

conduct, Atty. Gen. Edward H. Levi said last week that the department had "carefully studied" the matter. He noted that Ford had denied any White House approaches when he was questioned about it during his 1973 vice presidential confirmation hearings.

Levi said the department had found "no credible evidence, new or old, making appropriate the initiation of a further investigation."

Ford supported Levi's decision Wednesday when he was asked about it during a campaign stop in Atlantic City, N.J.

"I have full faith in the total integrity of the attorney general, Mr. Edward Levi, and his decision," Ford said. "I think that fully and completely ends the matter."

Reps. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) and Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.) had requested a Justice Department perjury investigation based on Dean's

charges about Ford in a new book and in recent interviews.

The two Democrats also noted that a Sept. 15, 1972, White House tape, in which then-President Richard M. Nixon told his aides that Ford's help should be enlisted, had not been disclosed at the time of Ford's confirmation hearings.

Dean said that Timmons and Cook, in separate conversations in 1972, told him that they had discussed strategy with Ford to block a Watergate inquiry by the House Banking and Currency Committee then headed by Rep. Wright Patman (D-Tex.). Timmons and Cook denied it.

A source familiar with Levi's decision said Cook was interviewed because his denial to reporters had not been a matter of official record.

By contrast, Dean's book, a 1973 affidavit by Timmons and sworn tes-

timony by Ford were all matters of record, the source said.

Asked why the department did not listen to additional White House tapes to try to resolve the dispute, the source added: "Our job is not in certifying political truth."

In a related development, Dean told a Los Angeles radio audience Wednesday that he had no tape recordings or notes of the alleged Timmons and Cook conversations, but "a very clear recollection of them."

Dean also said he would be willing to testify about the case under oath or take a lie-detector test, but that no official body had asked him to do so. He said he would appear before any congressional committee if subpoenaed.

Dean was interviewed by KABC newsman Michael Jackson and by Times Washington bureau chief Jack Nelson, who participated in the program from Washington.