

Nixon Speaks To Nation at 9 On Watergate

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President Nixon will end his self-imposed silence on Watergate tonight with one of the most crucial speeches of his long political career.

At a time when a new Gallup Poll shows that Mr. Nixon's support has sunk to the lowest figure for any President in two decades, he will speak on national television and radio from the Oval Office in the White

House. Mr. Nixon's speech will be carried live at 9 p.m. on Channels 4, 5, 7, 9 and 26.

The President yesterday put the finishing touches on his long-awaited speech, which will be accompanied by a more-detailed written statement giving his version of the Watergate events. It will be his third statement on Watergate but his first since the Senate select Watergate committee began its hearings.

White House officials have predicted that Mr. Nixon will seek renewed support from the American people in his television speech. These officials say that Mr. Nixon will admit to a lack of vigilance concerning the cover-up of the Watergate break-in but will deny that he had either advance knowledge of the break-in at Democratic headquarters or knowledge of the continuing White House cover-up from last summer until March of this year.

The 37 days of Senate hearings have raised questions and contradictions about Mr. Nixon's earlier versions of events.

For instance, ousted White House counsel John W. Dean III testified that he believed "the President was aware of an effort to cover up Watergate."

Dean also flatly disputed

Mr. Nixon's earlier statement that he began "intensive new inquiries into this whole matter" on March 21.

"... The President commenced no investigation at all," Dean testified. "Rather, the President, [H.R.] Haldeman and [John] Ehrlichman commenced to protect them-

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selves against the unraveling of the cover-up."

Dean's testimony is not alone in contradicting presidential statements of April 30 and May 22.

Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen testified that he warned the President on April 15 that Haldeman, then Mr. Nixon's chief of staff, might be indicted. Petersen said he urged the President to dismiss both Haldeman and Ehrlichman and to retain Dean, who was cooperating with federal prosecutors.

Instead of firing Haldeman, the President turned over to him the tape recording of the March 21 meeting

in which Dean said he warned Mr. Nixon about Watergate consequences. Two weeks later the President unceremoniously fired Dean and accepted the resignations of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, whom he described as "two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

Former Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III also testified that he warned the President that Watergate might lead higher as early as July 6, 1972. Dean testified that he warned the President about the cover-up on Sept. 15, a contention that Mr. Nixon is expected to specifically deny tonight.

The taped recording of that Sept. 15 meeting is one that is sought both by the Senate Watergate committee and Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Mr. Nixon has refused to make this and other tapes and documents available on constitutional grounds, and the issue is now before the courts.

The President is expected to reiterate tonight his argument that the constitutional separation of powers entitles him to withhold the tapes from Congress and from Cox.

Mr. Nixon has worked with a close circle of advisers including chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr., speechwriter Raymond Price and press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler in preparing his speech.

The preparation of his accompanying paper, considered a more legalistic defense of his position, has been under the supervision of White House counsel Leonard Garment and J. Fred Buzhardt.

According to various indications from White House aides, the President has followed his usual custom of spending several hours of time alone in reworking key

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passages of his speech.

Some aides said that Mr. Nixon hopes to "turn the corner on Watergate" and regards the speech as one way of doing this. The President also plans an increased number of public appearances in an effort to demonstrate that his administration is not paralyzed by Watergate.

Next Monday the President will address the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in New Orleans and proceed from there to California for what is expected to be a two-week stay.