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# President Denies Cover-Up Charge

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elliot L. Richardson pledged Monday to appoint a special outside prosecutor to investigate the Watergate scandal, if confirmed as attorney general, and said he will seek Senate approval of his choice.

The White House, acting on President Nixon's behalf and using language he approved, issued a sweeping denial that Nixon was involved in any way in the Watergate affair or its cover-up.

"Any suggestion that the President was aware of the Watergate operation is untrue," deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said in Key Biscayne, Fla., as the President wound up a long weekend there. "Any suggestion that the President participated in any cover-up activities is untrue."

Richardson called a news conference to announce he will heed growing demands for an independent prosecutor once he is confirmed as attorney general. He said he will seek approval for the prosecutor from the Senate Judiciary Committee and the full Senate—although such confirmation is not required.

Warren said Nixon had not talked with Richardson about such a special prosecutor nor had the names of any potential candidates been relayed to the President. Richardson said he has not yet found the right person for the probe.

His announcement met with approval in the Senate, which voted last week to urge such an appointment.

He made no estimate of when he will be ready to name the prosecutor, but said he will be given "all the independence, authority and staff support

needed to carry out tasks entrusted to him."

The prosecutor, Richardson said, will report only to him as attorney general—implying President Nixon will have no direct hand in the investigation.

The White House consistently has refused in recent weeks to comment on individual news reports on Watergate. But it broke its silence in the wake of newsmagazine stories that Nixon

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on personally congratulated ousted White House Counsel John W. Dean III last September for concealing administration connections to Watergate.

Time and Newsweek said Dean is prepared to give such testimony.

Dean reportedly is trying to get immunity from prosecution in return for his testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Watergate, which is scheduled to begin hearings about May 15.

The first such immunity was granted last week by Chief U.S. Dist. Judge John J. Sirica for E. Howard Hunt, one of the seven convicted conspirators in the burglary and bugging of Democratic Party headquarters last June 17. The immunity grant was revealed Monday.

It was the second time that Hunt, who pleaded guilty to the charges, was given so-called "use immunity. He and the six other conspirators in the case received similar grants for their testimony before a federal grand jury.

In Florida, Warren also denied an account in the current issue of Newsweek that Hunt had been promised executive clemency by John D. Ehrlichman.

"Any suggestion that the President ever authorized the offering of clemency to anyone in this case is . . . false," the deputy press secretary said.

Newsweek reported that after the December plane crash that killed Hunt's wife, the Watergate defendant sent his lawyer to the White House with the

message that "something had to be done" to prevent a long jail sentence for Hunt.

"Ehrlichman said 'I'll check,'" Newsweek reported. "He went in to see the President. When Ehrlichman returned, Dean said, he brought with him what he said was Mr. Nixon's promise of executive clemency for Hunt. Ehrlichman allegedly told Colson (Charles W. Colson, Ehrlichman's aide) to reassure . . . that 'everything is okay' but not to be 'too specific.'"

Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, D-Mont., said it now is up to the Senate whether to act on a resolution calling on Richardson to name a special prosecutor and asking Nixon to submit the appointee for approval.

Such a resolution was introduced last week by Sen. Edward W. Brooke, R-Mass.

Hugh Scott, the Senate Republican leader from Pennsylvania, said Richardson will give guidelines on the appointment when he appears before the Judiciary Committee Wednesday to begin confirmation hearings on his own appointment.

"He may be in a position to make an announcement on his selection not long after that," Scott said.