

# Democrats Reject GOP Proposal

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

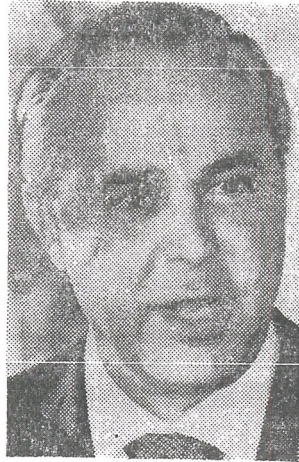
Democrats suing the Nixon re-election committee for \$6.4 million in the Watergate break-in and bugging have rejected a new offer to settle for \$600,000, but have indicated they are willing to make a deal for about twice as much. Negotiations resumed in late December and the offer was made on Jan. 9 in the office of Kenneth W. Parkinson, lawyer for the Republican defendants. The Washington Post learned yesterday.

Several days later, the offer was turned down by all five major plaintiffs—the Democratic National Committee, Robert S. Strauss and Lawrence F. O'Brien, its present and past chairmen; the Democratic State Chairman's Association and Spencer Oliver, the official whose phone was tapped.

Participants in the talks said that lawyers for the Democrats told Parkinson that the Committee alone wanted \$1.25 million, and that the other plaintiffs had not decided on any figure. Since then, they said, the Republicans have made no additional offer.

Strauss yesterday confirmed both the \$600,000 offer and the Democrats' rejection, and the fact that the Democrats have decided the time has come to make a deal if the price is right. Parkinson and Leon Knauer, lawyer for the Finance Committee for the Re-election of the President, another defendant, declined comment.

The \$600,000 is only \$75,000 more than the Republicans were said to have offered to settle the suit last April. Strauss said the National Committee needs more money



ROBERT S. STRAUSS



SPENCER OLIVER

... Democratic chairman and phone tap target

now because it has spent more than \$200,000 on legal fees concerning the suit since the last offer. He said he and

O'Brien were willing to waive any share of the settlement.

The Democrats are willing to settle now, he said, because

## of \$600,000 to Settle Suit

a major purpose of filing the suits—to bring out the facts in the Watergate case through the taking of depositions—has been served by other fact-finding groups.

"Our first objective was to try to light a fire under the whole Watergate break-in investigation," Strauss said. "It was the only real discovery going forward for a period of time.

"We have substantially completed our discovery process and the process has gone on by the courts, the Senate Select Committee, the grand jury and the special prosecutor."

Strauss said he has received a consensus of support for out-of-court settlement from members of the executive committee of the national committee, from governors, members of

Congress and other Democratic leaders. The executive committee was briefed on the offer at a closed meeting here on Jan. 11, he said.

Both the Republicans and the Democrats agreed, participants of the negotiations said, that continuation of the suits would only result in needlessly escalating legal costs. Also, they said, indictments in the Watergate case would halt the civil suits until criminal charges had been resolved, a process that could last two years or more.

When he first disclosed last April that he had been talking to the Republicans about a settlement, Strauss came under

fire from some fellow Democrats. They argued that the publicity from the suit alone was worth much more than any out-of-court deal could bring, and that the suit was a vital tool in uncovering evidence in the Watergate affair. Strauss subsequently said he would not settle then.

Among Strauss' severest critics then and now has been Oliver. Oliver charged yesterday that Strauss had tried to get the state chairman's association, for which Oliver worked, to join the national committee in a settlement and leave Oliver to carry on the legal fight on his own if he still chose.

He said Strauss had offered to charter a plane and fly to Boston for a midnight conference with leaders of the state chairmen's group on the night after the meeting in Parkinson's office, but they dissuaded him.

Strauss acknowledged yesterday that he had offered to go to Boston to see them when they could not accept his invitation to come to Washington to be briefed on the negotiations. Oliver said neither he nor the state chairmen's leaders knew of the talks with the Republicans' lawyers until Parkinson invited their lawyers to attend the Jan. 9 meeting.