

Democrats, Nixon Units Set to Settle

By Jules Witcover
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The Democrats have agreed to settle for \$775,000 in their Watergate break-in civil suit against two Nixon re-election campaign committees, Democratic sources said yesterday.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Robert S. Strauss, without specifying that dollar amount, said "general agreement" had been reached on the payment and that "serious negotiations" were continuing toward final settlement on other, less important points.

Other party sources said, however, that the Republicans had agreed to raise their previously rejected offer of \$600,000 to \$775,000, and that it had been accepted, subject to final details and approval by the executive committee of the Democratic National Committee.

In return, Strauss said, the Committee for the Re-election of the President and the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President, the defendants in the suits, have agreed to drop countersuits charging libel against the Democrats.

Sheldon Cohen, general counsel for the Democratic National Committee, also declined to comment on the dollar amount "until we get it

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buttoned up. It's pretty sure, but we're still talking."

Kenneth W. Parkinson and Leon Knauer, lawyers for the two Nixon campaign committees, were not available for comment.

Of the total, other Democratic sources said, \$670,000 is to go to the Democratic National Committee, which sued the two Nixon committees for \$6.4 million in damages, and \$105,000 to the Democratic State Chairmen's Association and eight state chairmen, who sought \$10 million.

Technically, these sources said, a substantial amount of the total paid is to go to Lawrence F. O'Brien, chairman of the national committee at the time of the June, 1972, break-in, but O'Brien has said he will turn his share over to the committee. Strauss has said he would do the same.

The state chairmen, under the reported agreement, are to receive about \$5,000 each from the \$105,000 for use in party affairs in their own states, with the balance going into the treasury of the chairmen's association.

Strauss said the Republicans made the latest offer about three weeks ago. It was presented to the executive committee of the Democratic National Committee on Feb. 14, at which time agreement of the state chairmen was achieved. Strauss said he hoped to submit the agreement to the executive committee for final approval when it meets here on Feb. 28.

The major incentive for both sides, Strauss said, was financial—the desire to cut legal costs that have mounted

since the first of the suits was filed by the Democrats in June, 1972. Strauss said the national committee has spent more than \$250,000 in legal fees so far.

Still outstanding after the final settlement will be a separate suit for \$5 million in damages against both Nixon campaign committees filed by Spencer Oliver, former executive director of the state chairmen's association. Oliver's phone at the Democratic National Committee headquarters was tapped for three weeks prior to the break-in that resulted in the Watergate arrests.

Oliver resisted earlier efforts to bring him into a general settlement negotiated by Strauss and the national committee lawyers, arguing the case should be continued to bring out more evidence on Watergate. Yesterday, he said he was not even asked this time and intended to pursue his own case to settlement or trial.

"I don't want to be involved in a settlement negotiated by Strauss under circumstances that I consider suspicious and mysterious," he said.

Oliver said he still had not been able to find out from Strauss why the national chairman talked to former Attorney General and Nixon re-election committee champion manager John N. Mitchell last April about settling the suits.

"I want to hear about the secret meetings with John Mitchell, who was not even a defendant or a lawyer for any defendants in the suits," Oliver said. "I want to know why he was meeting with him, who arranged it, what was said, what pressures were brought on Strauss in their behalf."