

Nixon Grilled By Senators On Watergate

'Solution' Ahead, Republicans Ask Haig Forecasts Precise Report

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By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

White House officials yesterday hinted that President Nixon was moving toward a face-to-face meeting with the Senate Watergate committee but would make no final decision until U.S. District Court Chief Judge John J. Sirica has ruled on pending legal questions.

"The President is moving toward a solution that will satisfy the needs of the Senate Watergate committee," said White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. "We're moving slowly because the matter is in court."

Earlier in the day the Senate Watergate committee voted 5 to 1 to request formally a meeting of its full membership with the President.

White House officials and Republican congressional leaders who met Friday and Monday with Mr. Nixon said that any session with the committee would reflect the President's decision to answer questions in the "three forums" of the court, the Senate committee and American public opinion.

It is in the last forum, said Sen. William Brock of Tennessee, where the judgment on Watergate ultimately will be determined.

A variety of public appearances, both personal and on television, have been proposed to Mr. Nixon by his staff as the President embarks on this latest attempt to convince the public that he was not personally

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By Carroll Kilpatrick

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President Nixon was grilled by 15 Republican Senators on the inflamed Watergate affair yesterday and was told that he must make a "frank and open" report to the country to restore his credibility.

Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.) a member of the Senate Watergate committee, said "senator after senator" made the point that a precise report to the country was essential and that on the Watergate issue the White House had done "too little and too late" time after time.

Asked if the meeting was frank, Gurney said: "It was frank. You bet it was."

Yesterday's meeting, which lasted two hours and 15 minutes, was in sharp contrast to earlier meetings the President has held where he did all or most of the talking.

The President opened the meeting with a 30-minute report on the energy crisis, foreign policy and Watergate. Then he submitted himself to questioning, which one White House aide described as "very frank, very forthright, very tough."

Gurney said the President "took it well," that he "understood" the reason for the tough questioning and agreed with the general sentiment that he must make a full and candid report.

But Gurney said no details were discussed and that no decisions were made about the course of future action.

Mr. Nixon is to hold breakfast meetings today, Thursday and Friday with House Republicans, who will also have the opportunity to in-

terrogate him. He is to hold similar meetings this afternoon and Thursday with the remaining Senate Republicans.

Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (Pa.) led the GOP senators to the White House for yesterday's late afternoon meeting, which

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involved in the Watergate scandals.

Yesterday, Haig was quoted in a United Press International story as saying that White House tapes showed that Mr. Nixon expressed shock and surprise when then-White House Counsel John W. Dean III told him details of the Watergate cover-up on March 21.

UPI quoted "a number of top Republicans on Capitol Hill" as saying that Haig had disclosed to them that the President said "oh, my God," repeatedly when Dean made his revelations.

"All of this is illegal; I want nothing to do with it," the President was quoted as saying.

But Haig, when asked about this account, said he had not listened to the tapes. He specifically disavowed a quotation in the UPI story saying that, "We've got John Dean on perjury."

Haig went on to say, however, that he understood that there was "a great deal of exculpatory evidence for President Nixon" on the March 21 tape and that it was his belief that it would show Mr. Nixon's innocence.

The action by the Senate Watergate committee requesting a direct meeting with the President came on the motion of Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), with Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.) dissenting. Sen. Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.) was absent.

Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the committee's ranking Republican, and Gurney were among the

group of GOP senators who met last night with the President at the White House.

Weicker, who would be scheduled to go to the White House with the group of GOP senators who will meet with Mr. Nixon on Thursday, said he would not attend any meeting with the President other than a meeting with the Senate Watergate committee.

"I think this committee should stick together," Weicker said. "I think the only way we get edged out is when we get picked off one by one."

Sen. Joseph M. Montoya (D-N.M.) also said he would not see Mr. Nixon except with the committee. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) was noncommittal on this point, and Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) said he would make no decision until he received an invitation.

None of the Democratic members of the committee has been invited to the White House. The Republican members have been invited only as GOP members of the Senate, who are meeting with Mr. Nixon in three alphabetically divided contingents beginning yesterday.

Even if the President decides firmly that he wants to meet with the Watergate committee, the White House and the committee are apparently headed for a serious conflict on the form and timing of the meeting.

The discussion in the White House has centered on an "informal" meeting with the committee. But the resolution adopted yesterday by the committee calls for a session under oath in which the President would both make a statement and respond to questions.

A transcript would be made of the meeting, and it would be made immediately available to the public.

Such a forum is considered of doubtful acceptability to the White House, even though Mr. Nixon is reported ready to make a formal affidavit swearing that he was not personally involved in Watergate or the subsequent cover-up.

Rep.ohn Anderson (R-Ill.) said the affidavit had been discussed by the President at last Friday's meeting with GOP congressional leaders. According to another of the congressmen who was prej-

sent, the affidavit described various tapes and memoranda that will be presented to the court, and contained quotations and descriptions of what was said on the tapes in various conversations.

The affidavit lays out the President's case in some detail with supporting descriptions of conversations which Mr. Nixon believes will prove his innocence.

The White House wanted to make the entire affidavit public, according to congressional and White House sources. However, this was deemed "inappropriate" by Judge Sirica, and the White House instead released a truncated "public statement" on Monday.

One White House official described Mr. Nixon's efforts of this week to explain his case to congressmen as the prelude to "taking the offensive in every form possible."

Mr. Nixon has not appeared in public outside of Washington since Aug. 20, when he addressed the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in New Orleans, an event marred by an assassination threat and Mr. Nixon's shoving of White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler.

But the President plans to fly Sunday to Macon, Ga., where he is to participate in separate ceremonies honoring Carl M. Vinson, the retired dean of the House of Representatives, and marking the 100th anniversary of Mercer Law School. On Tuesday he is to speak to the Republican Governors Association meeting in Memphis.

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press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said was designed to meet "head-on" criticisms of the President's role in the Watergate scandal.

The President had met Monday morning with the Republican Coordinating Committee and Monday afternoon with seven Southern Democratic senators—James O. Eastland and John C. Stennis (Miss.), John J. Sparkman and James B. Allen (Ala.), Russell B. Long (La.), John L. McClellan (Ark.) and Harry F. Byrd Jr. (Va.). Byrd, a former

Democrat, is an Independent.

At the meeting with Republicans, Mr. Nixon spoke for about 45 minutes in defense of his role in the Watergate matter, and also referred to other recent criticisms involving his home purchases and the ITT anti-trust case, those who attended reported after the meeting.

They met with the President at breakfast, and there was no opportunity for questions. Rep. John J. Rhodes (Ariz.), chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee and the leading candidate to succeed Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford as House GOP leader, said he was satisfied that the President will make a "full disclosure" of his Watergate role.

Asked if those attending

the meeting were allowed to ask questions that were on their minds, Rhodes replied: "There were no questions. It was a monologue."

At the Monday afternoon meeting with Democratic senators, very little time was devoted to Watergate. One senator said the President spent only "two or three minutes" on Watergate and another said "not more than 15 or even 10 minutes" was devoted to the subject.

Sparkman aid of the meeting that "it wasn't a Watergate thing." He said Mr. Nixon spent about half the time at the hour and a half meeting talking about the nation's energy requirements, then reported on the Middle East cease-fire and talked foreign policy in general, with emphasis on relations with Moscow and Peking.

On Watergate, the President "said he was going to make everything known," Sparkman said, mainly through information provided to U.S. District Court Chief Judge John J. Sirica.

"He seemed to think everything would work out all right," Sparkman said. "He seemed in excellent form and talked easily."

At a Capitol Hill news conference, Sen. John G. Tower (R-Tex.) said the President "told the Coordinating Committee (Monday) that all these charges would be answered."

Last Friday, Tower said, the President held a meeting with House and Senate GOP leaders to give them "an opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions and offer counsel."

The meeting was designed to "open up somewhat toward members of Congress," Tower said, "to open up lines of communication."

"It is my own view that ultimately the President will be vindicated of any implication in planning Watergate or the subsequent cover-up," Tower said.

Attending last night's meeting were Sens. Scott, Baker, Gurney, George D. Aiken (Vt.), Dewey F. Bartlett (Okla.), J. Glenn Beall Jr. (Md.), Bill Brock (Tenn.), Edward W. Brooke (Mass.), James L. Buckley (N.Y.), Clifford P. Case (N.J.), Marlow W. Cook (Ky.), Norris Cotton (N.H.), and Bob Dole (Kans.).