

Hill Talks May Hurt President

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President Nixon's whirlwind week of meetings with congressional Republicans over the scandals laid to the White House could come back to haunt him.

That at least is the view of Rep. Charles W. Whalen (R-Ohio) who said that Mr. Nixon's explanations at times failed to deal with the questions put to him in the closed sessions and at times seemed to contradict what is already public record, including testimony given under oath.

Voicing frustration with the session he attended last week, Whalen said it reminded him of a piano-playing exercise.

"My wife plays the piano," he said, "and I guess there's this exercise called 'fingering the piano.' You just run your fingers over the keyboard without hitting the keys.

"That's what we've been doing this week—fingering the keys without really hitting them."

Whalen based his remarks on a breakfast session he attended with 27 other House Republicans Friday morning—Mr. Nixon's final one of the week with members of Congress in what White House aides have called a determined campaign "to set the record straight."

At the Friday session, however, according to reports from Whalen and others, Mr. Nixon seemed to be contradicting the testimony under oath that former Attorney General John N. Mitchell gave in 1972 about dealings involving the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp.

Whalen, who took notes at the meeting, said the President was asked about his or-

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dering then-Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst in April of 1971 to drop the court appeal of an U.S. antitrust case against ITT.

When news of that came out last month, the White House acknowledged that Mr. Nixon had intervened, but that he withdrew his objections "when the specific facts of the appeal were subsequently explained to him in greater detail."

The President indicated to the House Republicans that the explanation came from then-Attorney General Mitchell who told him that "Kleindienst will quit" unless the appeal were pursued.

Whalen, who said his notes included verbatim quotes, said Mr. Nixon then told how he agreed that the appeal should be taken "and in the meantime, we'll try to work out a divestiture" of some of ITT's holdings.

This, Mr. Nixon reportedly added, was precisely what happened. "ITT stock went down 10 points," he was reported as recalling Friday.

Mitchell, however, had disqualified himself in April of 1969 from antitrust cases against ITT because his former law firm had done legal

work for one of the big conglomerate's subsidiaries.

"The President has never talked to me about any antitrust case that was in the department," Mitchell told the Senate Judiciary Committee on March 14, 1972. "... Specifically, with respect to ITT or any other (particular antitrust) litigation, no, I have never talked to the President about it."

At another point during the Friday breakfast session, the President was asked by Rep. Vernon W. Thomson of Wisconsin whether he hadn't broken his word about the Watergate investigations by ordering the dismissal last month of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Whalen said Mr. Nixon gave this account of Cox's ouster on Saturday, Oct. 20:

"Cox changed [his] mind on Friday night because of lack of confidence in Stennis. We didn't know until Saturday he'd changed his mind."

In fact, Cox had already informed White House lawyer Charles Alan Wright—in a letter delivered that Friday morning, Oct. 19—that he "could not conscientiously agree" to the demands that Wright had put to him over the telephone the night before, on Oct. 18.