

Watergate Unit May Expand Probe's Scope

By John Hanrahan
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The leaders of the Senate select Watergate committee suggested yesterday that the committee may try to take up some of the slack left by the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and expand its investigation of the Watergate scandal.

Chairman Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) said the committee might delve more deeply into campaign financing than it had originally intended, in order to bring greater public attention to an area that was being investigated by Cox' office.

Ervin also said that "there will probably be a genuine effort on the part of Congress to take and set up a special prosecutor under special law."

Vice Chairman Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), in a telephone interview, said it was "certainly not beyond the realm of possibility" that Cox would be called to testify before the committee.

Baker said he also had "toyed with the idea of talking with former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson, who resigned Saturday night, and William D. Ruckelshaus, who quit the same night as deputy attorney general.

Baker said he planned to talk informally to Richardson and Ruckelshaus "because they are my friends," but said he couldn't speculate as to whether the committee would want to call them formally as witnesses.

It was Ervin and Baker who last Friday night accepted President Nixon's offer to turn over to the committee summaries of tape recordings of White House conversations relating to the

Watergate affair that had been subpoenaed by the committee. Cox had refused Mr. Nixon's offer of the summaries, and said he would ignore the President's order to stop pursuing the tapes issue any further in the courts.

After Cox's refusal, he too was fired Saturday night.

Baker said yesterday that "In the absence of the special prosecutor and anticipating the eventual acquisition of transcripts," the committee "may be inclined to look with greater care into certain areas."

Once the White House turns over the tape documents, Baker said, "this may lead to the calling of further witnesses, and the recall of previous witnesses and this is likely to extend the hearings."

Baker said all of his comments were "the rankest speculation on my part," because he said he has not talked with any committee members over the weekend.

Ervin offered no specifics in his suggestion that the committee may look more deeply into campaign contributions, but said:

"I think perhaps we'll have to go into an investigation of the methods employed to raise campaign contributions and how those campaign contributions were disbursed."

One likely target of such an intensified investigation would be a secret cash contribution of \$100,000 from aides to billionaire recluse Howard Hughes to C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, President Nixon's closest confidant. The cash was delivered to Rebozo in two payments in 1969 and 1970.

Rebozo reportedly told the committee in a private interview that the money had been a campaign contribution but that it was actually never used in the campaign. Instead, he said, he held on to the money and returned it to Hughes earlier this year.

Ervin first made his suggestion that the committee might expand its work and that Congress might move to set up its own special prosecutor at a fund-raising party Saturday night in Asheville, N.C. Ervin was unreachable yesterday, but his press secretary, W. Hall Smith, said Ervin, at the present time, has no plans to return to Washington before Oct. 29.

The committee had planned to resume its public Watergate inquiry on Oct. 30. Smith said that, barring additional developments, Ervin probably would hold a closed executive session that day, before the public session resumes, to decide the committee's future course.

The committee was expected to return to wrap up the "dirty tricks" phase of the investigation, and then proceed into campaign financing. Committee sources indicated yesterday that the firing of Cox may seriously alter that schedule.

The exact future of the hearings was unclear yesterday

because most committee members and staff officials were unavailable for comment or were not answering their phones.

One committee member who was available, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), said he had no idea what the committee planned to do because neither Ervin nor Baker has called him to tell him about the arrangement they made with the White House last Friday night.

Weicker, as he did Saturday before Cox was fired, said yesterday in a telephone interview that Cox had done the right thing in refusing to accept transcripts or summaries and that "I will have no part of it either." He said Ervin and Baker had no authority to agree to receive transcripts of tapes without consulting other committee members.

If enough other committee members object to the arrangement, this also could change the direction in

which the arrangement "a deal between an evasive President and an easily misled Congress."

Weicker said he would be in Washington today "ready to go to work," but that he knew of no plan to resume committee hearings before next week. He said he had no suggestion for any new direction for the committee to take, but said that he had been pushing all along "to investigate every facet" of the Watergate affair. He said he had no idea what Ervin and Baker planned to do "because they never talked to me."

Baker defended yesterday the decision by Ervin and himself to accept tape documents from the White House. In so doing, Baker said, the committee "gave up nothing" and still had the right to continue to seek the tapes through the courts. In the meantime, he said, he favored "taking what we can get now."

Baker said he did not think that the decision to accept the tape documents needed to be voted on by the committee, but that "of course, the committee can do whatever it wants."

Both Ervin and Baker said it was their understanding that the committee was to

get verbatim transcripts. Baker said he understood that the White House would provide transcripts for portions of the tapes directly relating to Watergate matters, and only summaries of portions of the tapes unrelated to Watergate. Also, he said, White House officials had said they might "clean up some of the salty language on the tapes."

Baker said it would be up to Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.), named by President Nixon as the man who would listen to the tapes and compare them to the White House documents to be provided to the committee, to see to it that the expected transcripts are "complete and authentic."

It also would be up to Stennis, Baker said, to determine how he would check the tapes for authenticity. He suggested that it was within Stennis' authority to consult with experts to verify the tapes' authenticity.

One side-effect of the Cox firing, sources said yesterday, was an effort by some committee staff members to obtain Watergate information from Cox staffers. Contacts between the two offices were made, sources said, but it is known if any information was passed to the committee.