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Dean Speaking Out On the Coverup

By Paul Galloway and Morton Kondracke

WASHINGTON (CS-T) — Fired Presidential counsel John W. Dean 3d will issue a public statement today accusing the White House of attempting to conceal its involvement in the Watergate break-in and coverup and of trying to muzzle and discredit him.

Dean will charge, close associates told the Chicago Sun-Times, that high government officials are engaged in a campaign to keep him from telling the truth about Watergate, using these devices:

¶ Refusal to grant him the immunity from prosecution that would ensure his full testimony before the grand jury.

¶ Imposition of executive privilege in an effort to restrict disclosure of conversations he had with President Nixon.

¶ Assertions that his revelations may compromise national security.

According to the associates, Dean went to Nixon on March 21 and urged him to order all White House aides to tell the truth about Watergate. Dean argued that the full story of the break-in, its coverup and related incidents could not be kept secret, they said.

Dean was not sure at the time how much the President knew about White House involvement in the scandal, the associates said, but he suspected that Nixon knew as early as last Aug. 29 that Dean had not conducted the "complete investigation" that the President said had cleared all then-employed White House aides.

At the time of the Aug. 29 statement, said the Dean associates, Nixon had received no investigative report from Dean and had not asked for one. Dean, in fact, first learned on the radio that the White House was saying that a probe was under way, they said.

Dean's associates confirmed a Newsweek magazine report that Nixon had said to Dean, "Nice job, John," when only seven persons—none an active White House aide—were indicted last September for

Continued on Page 4

Dean Speaking Out

Continued From Page 1

the break-in at Democratic headquarters.

They said Newsweek was incorrect in its version of the March 21 meeting, however. The magazine implied that Nixon was shocked literally out of his chair by news that Dean conducted no investigation and that a cover-up had taken place.

Actually, according to his associates, Dean believes it was his declaration that covering up would not succeed that caused Nixon to be "startled, incredulous, shocked."

Dean is said to have told the President that the full story of Watergate would eventually emerge because too many persons had information about it for the full story to be permanently concealed.

The associates said Dean referred in his argument to Watergate-related incidents

Dean and the ITT: See Jack Anderson on Page 43.

such as the 1971 burglary to obtain psychiatric records on Pentagon Papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg.

Go to Prosecutors

Dean told the President, his friends said, that "there is a cancer on the Presidency" and that the only way to restore the credibility of the Administration was for everyone having knowledge of the scandal to go to federal prosecutors and tell what they knew.

Nixon has said he received important new information on March 21 that led him to launch a new, private investigation of Watergate which has led to the resignation of his top two aides, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, and to Dean's dismissal.

Dean's associates said that within a week of the March 21 meeting, Nixon asked for Dean's resignation.

They said the President

called Dean into his office and said, "I have prepared a letter of resignation and I want you to sign it." The President turned the letter around on his desk so that it faced Dean. Dean read it, but refused to sign.

In Seculsion

At that point Dean, who is now in seclusion outside of Washington, was said by his friends to believe the continuing effort to discredit him began.

Dean heard that White House staff members were asked to submit memos that could be used in an effort to stain his reputation and credibility, and he was cut off from communications with the top echelon of Nixon's staff.

Dean was said to believe that Haldeman and Ehrlichman assured Nixon that a strategy of standing firm with denials of White House involvement in Watergate would succeed.

According to his associates, Dean had based his case to Nixon not only on the likelihood that information about Watergate would break, but also collateral problems as well, such as the since-disclosed burglary at the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Dean's associates said Dean first approached Watergate prosecutors with his story immediately after his resignation was requested by the President, or about April 5.

Immunity Issue

On April 17, Nixon said on national television that new evidence that had turned up raised the issue of immunity from prosecution. The President said he had "expressed to the appropriate authorities the view that no individual holding . . . a position of major importance in the Administration should be granted immunity from prosecution."

Dean has learned, said his friends, that an original draft of the statement did not contain that language and that Ehrlichman was responsible for its being added.

On April 19, Dean issued his last public statement, pledging that he would not be made "a scapegoat" in the affair.

If he testified without immunity, his associates said, Dean could go to jail on evidence obtained by self-incrimination. So if he is forced to appear before the grand jury without immunity, he will probably invoke the Fifth Amendment.

The full truth about Watergate will emerge, the associates said, only if Dean testifies, and he will testify only if he has immunity from prosecution.

Resists Plea

The Justice Dept. is insisting that it will not grant Dean immunity, preferring to prosecute him and attempting to obtain evidence on his White House superiors by other means.

Dean's associates said the second device being used to bar Dean testimony, Executive privilege, was imposed by Nixon last Friday. The President declared that White House aides would not be permitted to tell the grand jury, the FBI or Senate investigators about their conversations with him or discussions among aides concerning advice to Nixon.

They are also forbidden under the rules to talk about White House papers, some of which Dean has locked in a safe deposit box. The Justice Dept. is suing for recovery of the papers.

Third, according to Dean's associates, Dean is being pressured to make less than full disclosure by assertions that release of some of his information — such as that concerning the Ellsberg burglary and phone taps on reporters — would damage the national security.

Dean's friends said he would issue his statement today as a means of winning immunity and because he no longer feels he is merely serving the President, but the U. S. government, his own ethical code and his love of country.