

Fear of a Senate Inquiry, Bids to Block It Described

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WASHINGTON, June 25—President Nixon and his top White House aides, expressing fear of the “uncontrollable, if not hostile, forum” of the Senate, repeatedly attempted to obstruct and delay the proposed Senate Watergate investigation early this year, John W. Dean 3d testified today.

“We had made it through the trial without any problems, but the Senate hearings were a new and possibly larger problem,” Mr. Dean told the Senate Watergate committee. “The Senate was different than the courts, grand jury, F.B.I. and the like that had been dealt with earlier.”

Nonetheless, Mr. Dean said, the White House tried. The former White House counsel spent nearly an hour describing how an informal attack group, led by W. R. Haldeman, then the White House chief of staff and John D. Ehrlichman, then Mr. Nixon’s top domestic adviser, planned to balk the Senators.

A similar attempt to derail a planned House hearing last October had been successful, Mr. Dean related, with the aid of a letter requested by the White House from a high-ranking Justice Department official saying that the proposed hearings would damage the Government’s position in subsequent criminal proceedings.

Patman Holds Hearings

Representative Wright Patman, of Texas, chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee, held the hearings anyway, with Mr. Patman bearing empty witness chairs that symbolized the high Government witnesses who did not appear.

The basic White House strategy to counter the Senate was devised during a two-day meeting near the California White House at San Clemente in February, Mr. Dean said. The meeting was attended by himself, Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Ehrlichman and a White House aide, Richard A. Moore, a former Justice Department official, Mr. Dean said.

Mr. Dean turned over to the Senate committee a series of memorandums from those ses-

sions in which Mr. Haldeman allegedly expressed in writing his thoughts “on perpetuating the Watergate tactics or the cover-up by a counteroffensive against the forthcoming Senate hearings.”

“What had happened by this point in time,” Mr. Dean explained, “was that the cover-up had become a way of life at the White House, and having made it to this point, those involved were becoming careless and more open about it.”

The White House had found its ability to influence the Senate, and particularly Senate Democrats, to be slight, Mr. Dean said, and it was decided to concentrate on the Republican members.

No Data Available

The former White House counsel indicated that there were little, or no, information available to the high White House officials about the four Democratic members of the committee. He told, for example, of reading the data on Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii from The Congressional Directory.

With Mr. Ehrlichman doing most of the analysis, Mr. Dean said, it was agreed that Senator Lowell P. Weicker, Republican of Connecticut, “was an independent who could give the White House problems.”

Senator Edward J. Gurney, Republican of Florida, “was considered a sure friend and protector of the President’s interest,” Mr. Dean quoted President Nixon in a later conversation as saying that he was confident that Mr. Gurney “would protect the White House and would do so out of political instinct and not have to be persuaded to do so.”

The other Republican Senator, Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, “was an unknown,” Mr. Dean told Senator Baker and his colleagues, “and neither Haldeman nor Ehrlichman knew which way he might go.”

“The long and short of this discussion was that the White House had one friend, Senator Gurney,” Mr. Dean added, “and the possibility of wooing and winning another.”

The office of Senator Gurney, reached after Mr. Dean’s testimony, refused comment.