

Patman's '72 Probe Effort Recalled

By Ronald Kessler
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Former presidential counsel John W. Dean III detailed yesterday what he said were repeated White House attempts to block an early congressional investigation of the Watergate scandal.

The events Dean described went back to last summer when Rep. Wright Patman (D-Tex.), the chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee, announced his intention to probe laundering of Republican campaign funds through foreign countries and U.S. banks.

At the time, no high Nixon administration official had been implicated in the break-in at Democratic

headquarters on June 17, 1972, nor was there any public hint of a cover-up of the break-in by the White House.

The investigation by the House banking committee was eventually stopped by a 20-to-15 vote of its own members last Oct. 3.

Patman charged at the time that the 14 Republicans, four southern Democrats, and two other Democrats who voted to block the probe had been pressured to do so by the White House.

"I predict," he said, "that the facts will come out, and when they do I am convinced that they will reveal why the White House was so anxious to kill the committee's investigation."



WRIGHT PATMAN

... 'facts will come out'

As told by Dean at the Senate Watergate hearings yesterday, the White House was concerned about the possibility of a congressional probe, for two reasons:

"First, the hearings would result in more adverse pre-election publicity regarding the Watergate; and second, they just might stumble into something that would start unraveling the cover-up Dean testified.

The White House attempt to block the probe took a number of forms, Dean alleged, including:

- Drafting of a letter by a lawyer for the Nixon re-election committee for a Republican member of the banking committee.

- An attempt to find a "soft spot" in the political or personal life of Patman.

- A check of campaign contribution reports of each member of the banking committee.

- Discussions with Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen to persuade the Justice Department to publicly oppose the hearings.

- An attempt to influence the General Accounting Office to go easy on any investigation for Patman of Republican campaign finances.

By all accounts, the effort within the banking committee to stop the investigation was spearheaded by Rep. Garry E. Brown (R-Mich.). Brown said at the time he was concerned about the rights of the seven men indicted in the break-in, and he denied any White House pressure.

Dean said yesterday that Kenneth W. Parkinson, then a lawyer for both the re-election committee and former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans, was "put in touch" with Rep. Brown, probably because "Brown indicated his willingness to assist."

Brown then sent a letter to the Justice Department to suggest that the department issue an opinion opposing the planned hearings on the grounds they would deprive the defendants of a fair trial, Dean said.

In fact, Dean charged, the letter was "drafted by Parkinson." Dean did not state the basis of his knowledge.

Parkinson could not be reached yesterday for comment.

Brown said he got in touch with Stans, then Parkinson, to get more details about Stans' interview with the banking committee staff. He said the charge that his letter had been drafted by Parkinson was a "lie." He said he would ask to testify before the Senate committee to rebut Dean's charges.

The Justice Department eventually issued a letter opposing the hearings, and it became a focal point of the committee debate that resulted in a vote to stop the Watergate probe.



United Press International
Sen. Howard Baker (left) and Chairman Sam Ervin of Watergate committee confer as John Dean testifies.