

Sirica Panel Begins

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Doctors Seek Clarification of Orders

By Thomas O'Toole
Washington Post Staff Writer

The chairman of a three-doctor panel charged with finding out if former President Nixon is fit to testify in the Watergate trial said yesterday that it would be at least 10 days before the panel could examine Mr. Nixon.

"We only spoke among ourselves yesterday and that was to try to work out the logistics of this to find out how it can be arranged," said Dr. Charles A. Hufnagel, chief of surgery at Georgetown University Hospital and chairman of the team of three physicians appointed by U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica to determine Mr. Nixon's fitness.

"Once we have a time-frame worked out we will proceed with the judge's charge," Hufnagel said.

Hufnagel added that he probably will meet late next week in Dallas with the other members of his team, Drs. John A. Spittell Jr. of Minnesota's Mayo Clinic and Richard Starr Ross of Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University Hospital. Ross is president of the American Heart Association, which will be meeting there, and the other two are members.

Hufnagel said his first concern was getting Sirica's order, clarified, particularly how the team should arrange to see Mr. Nixon's medical records, talk to his doctors and examine Mr. Nixon himself.

"We would like to know if Mr. Nixon would agree to such an exam," Hufnagel said in a press conference at Georgetown Hospital. "We would like to know whether Mr. Nixon and his doctors will or will not oppose such an exam, which is more a legal problem than a medical one."

Hufnagel said he would like Sirica to establish contact between the three doctors and Mr. Nixon's staff. He said that neither he nor

the other doctors knows Mr. Nixon or any of his staff.

"What are we supposed to do, go to a hotel in California and start making phone calls to establish a contact," Hufnagel asked. "It is not the job of the panel to engage in a legal problem. That is the job for the courts and for the lawyers."

If the three doctors don't meet in Dallas, Hufnagel said, they will get together later in a convenient place to decide how to approach Mr. Nixon's doctors and what to ask for in order to fulfill Sirica's charge.

At the very least, Hufnagel suggested, the team will want to examine Mr. Nixon's hospital and medical records and interview his

doctors. Hufnagel said he thought the panel will want to examine Mr. Nixon also.

"I would find it difficult to report to the court without personally examining Mr. Nixon," he said. "The judge's charge, as I determine it, is whether Mr. Nixon can testify or not and if he can testify, under what conditions can he testify."

Hufnagel declined to speculate on what he felt were the critical aspects of Mr. Nixon's ailments until such time as he examines the former President and talks with his doctors.

The three physicians are expected to make a preliminary report to Sirica on Mr. Nixon's fitness to testify by Nov. 29, the day after Thanksgiving.



DR. JOHN A. SPITTELL JR. DR. CHARLES A. HUFNAGEL DR. RICHARD S. ROSS

... appointed by Judge John Sirica to examine former President Nixon.