

White House picked

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two White House aides, faced with news that the seams of the Watergate cover-up were popping, urged then-President Nixon to have former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell take the blame and face criminal indictment for the scandal.

"The jig is up," Watergate cover-up trial defendant John D. Ehrlichman urged Nixon to tell Mitchell on April 14, 1973.

Armed with indications that the two Watergate principals were about to begin confessing to federal prosecutors, Ehrlichman advised the president to tell Mitchell that he must "recognize that

you are not going to escape indictment. There's no way ..."

Watergate prosecutors introduced into evidence the tape recording of a one-hour, 56-minute conversation among Nixon, Ehrlichman and cover-up defendant H. R. Haldeman. The recording had been released previously by the White House.

Over and over, the jury heard Haldeman and Ehrlichman seek to persuade Nixon that only if Mitchell were to sacrifice himself would Watergate investigators be at least temporarily satisfied.

By the time of the April 14 conversation, Watergate conspirator E.

Howard Hunt had already indicated his intention to disclose what he knew. Mitchell's deputy at the 1972 Nixon re-election committee, Jeb Stuart Magruder, had also made preliminary moves toward cooperating with the prosecutors.

At one point Ehrlichman said Nixon should summon Mitchell, by then a private citizen in New York, and say:

"The thing is not going to go away, John, and by your sitting up there in New York and pretending that it is, it's making it worse.

"And it's been getting steadily worse on account of your sitting up there for the

THE POST, Frederick, Md., Wednesday, November 20, 1974 — Page A-3

Mitchell to shoulder blame

last couple of months. We're at the point now where we have no choice but to ask you to do this."

Midway through the conversation, Haldeman disclosed to Nixon that on Haldeman's orders White House aide Gordon Strachan had taped the conversation on April 12 with Magruder.

On that tape, Magruder said he would no longer lie to grand juries and that Mitchell was sure to be legally implicated.

During the April 14 meeting, Ehrlichman noted that having listened to the Magruder-Strachan conversation, he probably possessed information about a crime.

Nixon is heard to say, "Well the point is you've now told me. That's the problem."

Ehrlichman: "That's correct, that's correct."

Nixon: "... The problem of my position up to this time has been quite frankly, nobody ever told me a goddammed thing that Mitchell was guilty."

At that point, there was laughter from

both spectators and reporters inside the courtroom.

When the tape was over, Haldeman's principal attorney, John J. Wilson objected and asked U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica to forbid laughter during the playing of tapes.

Sirica said everybody in the courtroom should consider the case to be both important and "sad for many people."