

HARTFORD TABLES EASIER WIRETAPS

NYT
5/2/73

G.O.P. Leaders Bar Change in Wake of Watergate

By LAWRENCE FELLOWS

Special to The New York Times

HARTFORD, May 1—In response to the developing Watergate affair, Republican lawmakers in Connecticut have shelved legislation that would have eased restrictions on wiretapping.

"We were at a party at Watergate," Senator Lewis B. Roma, a Bloomfield Republican and the Senate majority leader, said this morning, "and I just felt it would be inappropriate for us to expand our wiretap legislation."

The Speaker of Connecticut's House of Representatives, Francis J. Collins, a Brookfield Republican, suggested that even if the bugging of Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington had not become a public issue, the proposals for new wiretap legislation in Connecticut would have had a difficult time.

The two men were instrumental in keeping the proposed legislation from coming onto the floor of either chamber for debate.

"There was a strong feeling that the law was still too new," the Speaker said.

Strict Law in Force

The existing wiretapping law is only a year old and is one of the strictest in the country. It permits wiretaps only by the state police, and then only with the approval of a panel of three Superior Court judges.

The only suspected crimes for which wiretapping may be used are those involving drugs, gambling and felonious crimes of violence. Even then, the state's attorney who seeks the authorization for tapping a suspect's telephone must show evidence gathered within 15 days of his request.

The authorization then lasts only 10 days, and may be renewed for three more 10-day periods, although each extension must be approved by the three-judge panel.

If the police, while tapping a line to gather evidence about one crime, hear about another for which the wiretap had not been sought, they may not introduce that evidence in court, not even if, for example, they learn that a suspected bookie had committed a murder.

The state police may not inform local police of criminal information accidentally gathered, such as where a suspected bookie lays off parts of the bets he takes.

If the evidence gathered by a wiretap does not lead to a prosecution, the suspect must

be informed that his wire was tapped.

Every person who was on the phone to him, and whose conversation was intercepted, must also be informed, and may petition the judges for a transcript or a taped copy of the conversation.

The state police have used the new law sparingly, having tapped 19 lines in the half year they could use the law last year, and six lines so far this year.

They wanted this year only to bring their wiretap law more closely into line with Federal wiretap legislation, making it necessary for them only to go to one judge, allowing them to seek authorization with evidence gathered in the previous 30 days and not just 15, allowing them to stay on a line for 30 days rather than 10 and giving them the right to disclose to local police or other agencies evidence of crimes other than the ones they suspected.

Gov. Thomas J. Meskill said after the election last year that he wanted a less-cumbersome wiretap law in Connecticut. With Republican majorities in both chambers of the Assembly, he hoped to get it through.

"The atmosphere isn't quite conducive to getting any wiretap legislation passed right now," a detective sergeant in the Criminal Intelligence Unit of the state police said today.

"Certainly Watergate brought on some shyness," Mr. Collins, the Speaker, said. "We will let the law we have work a little longer."

In the meantime, several proposals for a new wiretap law that had been presented to the Assembly's Judiciary Committee have been "boxed" there, that is, put away in a box to await action in some future session of the Legislature.