

Richardson Hearings Slated Before Senate Committee

By Spencer Rich

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Watergate scandal dominated Senate talk again yesterday, though the Senate put the topic aside long enough to approve legislation requiring reconfirmation of Cabinet officers every four years.

In a series of developments bearing on the Watergate dispute:

- Judiciary Committee Chairman James O. Eastland (D-Miss.) announced that hearings will start next Wednesday on President Nixon's nomination of Elliot L. Richardson to become Attorney General with full power to conduct an exhaustive Watergate investigation. Eastland's announcement came amid signs that Richardson will be heavily pressed, before his nomination is approved, to pledge appointment of a special prosecutor to conduct the Watergate probe.

One influential member of the Judiciary Committee said privately that a Richardson failure to do so—to remove any conceivable suspicion of an administration coverup—"could be a stumbling block" to his nomination, but added that he is convinced that Richardson is leaning toward such an appointment already.

- Sens. Norris Cotton (R-N.H.) and Carl Curtis (R-Neb.) angrily clashed on the floor with Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) over Percy's resolution, approved Tuesday with only a handful of senators on the floor, calling on the President to appoint a special Watergate prosecutor. "This resolution is not the sense of the Senate . . . it's the sense of five senators," said Curtis, adding that he objected mainly to the procedure of considering it without referral to committee and without what

he viewed as adequate notice.

Percy protested that he had obtained approval for floor consideration from both the Democratic and GOP leaders, and that it is routine to take up "sense of the Senate" resolutions with only a few on the floor when it is clear there is little opposition. He offered to move for reconsideration of the resolution if a definite time for a final roll call could be set, but Cotton refused to agree to set a time for a vote.

The net result is that Tuesday's action remains in effect. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), who wasn't present for the Tuesday vote, said he definitely would vote for the Percy resolution if it ever were reconsidered, and predicted it would pass again in such a case.

- Sen. James L. Buckley (Cons.-R.-N.Y.), one of the 19 sponsors of the Percy resolution, said, as did Percy, that the resolution wasn't intended in any way as a slap at the President or Richardson, but simply as a reassurance to the public. He told a press conference that he believes the President stated "the exact truth" Monday night when he said he had no foreknowledge of the Watergate affair and only became aware of any coverup late in March. He said he is "appalled" at the "gleeful" tone adopted by many papers at the President's discomfiture, that he fully backs Mr. Nixon's cleanup efforts, and that "it appears that the vultures are circling—hoping against hope to find the corpse of the presidency."

"I have total confidence in the President," Buckley said.

- Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) denied a pub-

lished report that he had warned the President that six GOP senators had threatened not to seek re-election next year because Watergate had made it impossible for them to be re-elected.

Scott-aides said the senator had discussed with White House aides some of the political dangers of the Watergate affair, but had never specifically said six senators had come to him with such a plaint. One of the senators mentioned in The Chicago Sun-Times report, Cotton, also denied making such a statement to Scott.

Cotton said the main factor that would decide whether he'd run wasn't the Watergate affair but his health and that of his wife.

The other senators Scott had reportedly named to the President were George D. Aiken (R-Vt.), Henry Bellmon (R-Okla.), Marlow W. Cook (R-Ky.), William B. Saxbe (R-Ohio) and Peter Dominick (R-Colo.).

Aiken, Bellmon, Cook and Dominick also issued flat denials of the story yesterday. "Completely and absolutely false," said Aiken. "A bunch of tripe," said Cook, "I never talked to him or the President about anything like this." "I certainly never discussed this," said Bellmon. "Not a word of truth," said a Dominick aide. Saxbe couldn't be reached for comment.

- Senate Majority Whip Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), who led the opposition to the nomination of L. Patrick Gray III as FBI director, from which Gray eventually withdrew as a result of criticism of his efforts to investigate the Watergate, said the President should immediately send to the Senate a nominee as permanent director.