

By LINDA CHARLTON  
 Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 16 — The Watergate hearings that begin tomorrow in the marble-columned caucus room of the Old Senate Office Building may be vital to the progress of Richard Nixon's Presidency. Another set of Congressional hearings, 25 years ago, propelled him from the obscurity of a Representative's first term onto the path to the White House.

Mr. Nixon himself has acknowledged that his role in those hearings of the House committee on American Activities, which dealt with the identification of Alger Hiss as a Communist by the late Whittaker Chambers, "brought me national fame." It was August, 1948; he was nearing the end of his first term as a Republican Congressman from California's 12th Congressional district. It was the first of his "six crises."

Four years later, at the 1952 Republican National Convention, Dwight D. Eisenhower introduced Mr. Nixon, by then a Senator, as his running mate with an easily recognizable reference to his "special talent and an ability to ferret out any kind of subversive influence wherever it may be found."

More recently, President Nixon recalled the Hiss-Chambers investigation when he said that the investigation of the Watergate affair by the Federal Bureau of Investigation made the Congressional investigation of Mr. Hiss look "like a Sunday-school picnic."

These are only two of the thousands of investigations undertaken by Congress since 1792, when a select committee was authorized to look into the circumstances of a disastrous

Indian victory in the Northwest Territory the previous year and authorized to "call for such persons, papers and records, as may be necessary to assist their inquiries." The investigation of the Army rout, in which 600 men were killed and 300 wounded, cleared the commander, Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair, of any blame.

In authorizing the investigation, Congress acted not on specific constitutional authority, but on the basis of the assignment to it of "all legislative powers" and the assertion that investigation is often a prerequisite for well-designed legislation. It acted, also, on the basis of precedent reaching back through the assemblies of the American colonies to the British Parliament.

Over the years, its investigative authority has been upheld by Supreme Court decisions recognizing specific powers such as the right to issue subpoenas, or to hold a recalcitrant witness in contempt. Some, but not all, have led to legislation, specific or generic.

Since that first inquiry, there have been Congressional investigations of many things from organized crime to hunger, from student activism to strike-breaking, and at a quickening pace. There were perhaps 500 such inquiries in the first 150 years, but in a single recent session of Congress (1967-1968) alone, 496 investigations were authorized, although many went no further than authorization.

Nor is Mr. Nixon the only man to have risen to national prominence with the bubble of publicity surrounding a particularly important investigation,

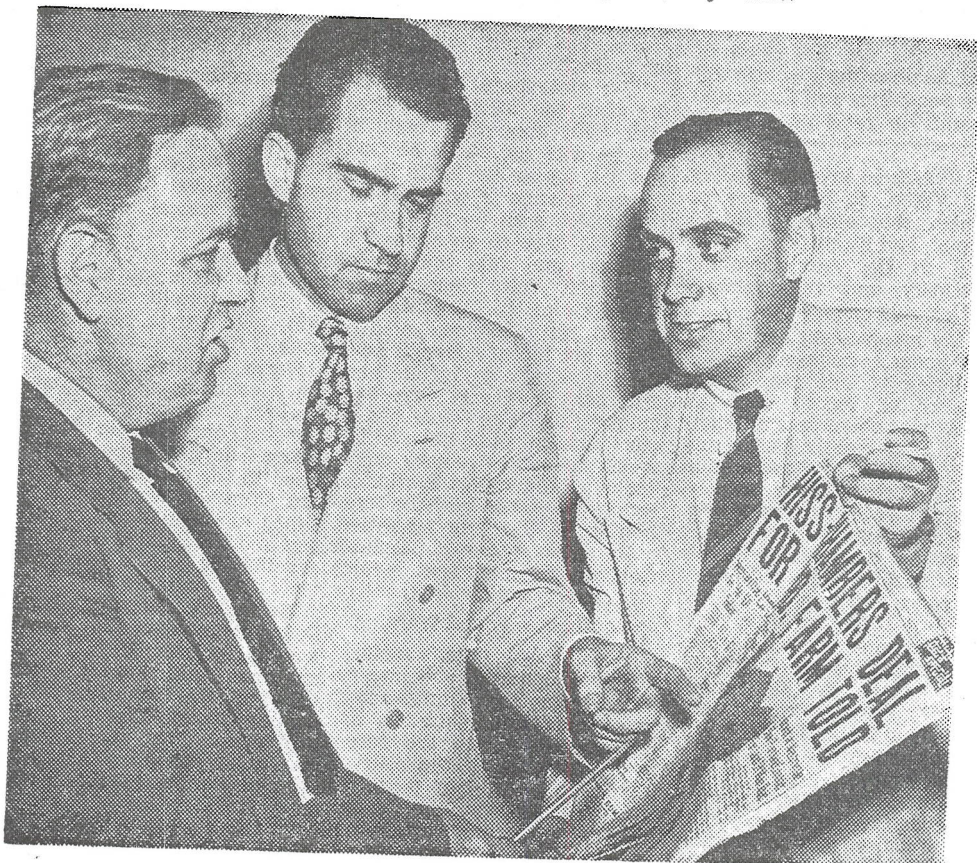
or the only one to prove intriguing to the public mind. The late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin rode to fame and ultimate ruin on the crest of such a wave, but there have been others whose names first came before the public in large type in connection with Congressional investigations.

They include, in recent years Harry S. Truman, a Missouri Senator who became chairman of a World War II committee investigating the national defense program; Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, who became the Democrats' 1956 Vice Presidential candidate after he chaired an organized-crime investigation; and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who first became known for his role as chief counsel to a labor-investigation committee.

Public hearings, the visible aspect of a Congressional investigation, are generally only the peak of an iceberg of work by committee staffs. But even this tip can reach mammoth proportions. From 1957 to 1959, for example, the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field took 46,150 pages of testimony from 1,726 witnesses (not all in public hearings); its 104 staff members traveled about 2.5 million miles and filed more than 19,000 investigative reports.

Television coverage of public hearings has, since 1948, focused more public attention both on the over-all investigations and on this most dramatic aspect of the entire process.

Following, from the 181 years of Congressional inquiries, are summaries of some of the major ones:



Richard M. Nixon as a Representative from California in August, 1948, with Whittaker Chambers, left, and a House Un-American Activities Committee aide. This was during the Hiss-Chambers investigation, which brought him national recognition.

Associated Press

# Key Role in History

**CIVIL WAR.** The first joint House-Senate panel was set up in 1861 to "inquire into the conduct of the present war." The hearings continued into 1865, and the committee tried to play a major role in the conduct of the war, examining battle plans and making generals jump. Gen. Robert E. Lee, the Confederate Commander in Chief, observed that the committee was worth perhaps two divisions of Confederate troops to the cause of the South.

**CREDIT MOBILIER.** Three committees, one on the Senate and two in the House, set to work in late 1872 to investigate charges of corruption that had tainted President Grant's re-election campaign. It was charged that Credit Mobilier Stock — a construction company set up to complete the last 667 miles of the Union Pacific railroad—had been used to bribe the former Vice President and a number of members of Congress to avert a Congressional inquiry into transportation rates. The investigations led to the censure of two Representatives.

**THE MONEY TRUST —** A House Banking and Currency subcommittee, in a year-long investigation, disclosed the existence of interlocking directorates among two Morgan— and Rockefeller-controlled groups of banks in New York linked to 112 of the largest corporations in the country. The subcommittee's call for corrective legislation led to such measures as the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 and the Federal Trade Commission Act of 1913.

**TEAPOT DOME —** In the same Senate caucus room that is the scene for the Watergate hearings, the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys opened its hearings in October, 1923, into the matter of the leasing of oil reserves at Elk Hills in California and Teapot Dome in Wyoming to private oil interests by the Secretary of the Interior. Albert B. Fall, whose financial condition had undergone a change for the better, perhaps coincidentally. In this most sensational of national scandals—until now—Fall was found to have accepted bribes of more than \$400,000, a charge on which he was later convicted and sentenced to prison and fined \$100,000. Congress, by joint resolution, ordered court action to cancel the leases as contrary to the public interest, which was done. The Attorney General, Harry W. Daugherty, was forced out of office for his failure to take action.

**STOCK EXCHANGE —** Wall Street financial shenanigans were the subject of this two-year inquiry, which led to such New Deal measures as the Banking Acts of 1933 and 1935 and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. The hearings disclosed some of the practices that had contributed to the 1929 stock market catastrophe.

**MINITIONS —** Although the results of this 1934-1936 inquiry led by Senator Gerald P. Nye were inconclusive, it stirred up controversy by its disclosures of foreign arms

deals. Despite the committee's failure to demonstrate its thesis that the arms industry was an international cartel devoted to promoting conflict, Senator Nye, an ardent isolationist, acquired enough stature to be considered a possible Democratic Vice Presidential candidate in 1936.

**WORLD WAR II** Known as the "Truman Committee" for its first chairman, this group was in existence from nine months before Pearl Harbor until 1948. It explored every aspect of defense, from shortages of materials to lobbyists. A quiet and highly regarded committee, it worked closely with the Executive branch and was able to have most of its recommendations effected before they were made public; from 1941 until 1947, all of its reports were unanimous.

**UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES** —The first investigation of this sort was authorized in 1918, and they have continued intermittently. Among the most famous, or notorious, of its wide-ranging investigations — which have taken in Nazism, the Ku KLUX KLAN and student activism, but which have concentrated on Communism— were those conducted by Senator McCarthy from 1950 until his censure by the Senate in late 1954. The Senator's scattershot allegations and flair for publicity aroused bitter controversy; in 1954, the Army charged the Senator and two aides with "improper influence" by Mr. McCarthy. There were 35 days of televised, highly emotional hearings resulting in a mixed verdict. Six months later, however, the Wisconsin Republican was formally censured by the Senate. His power faded as quickly as he had assumed it, and investigations "Un Americanism" lost much of their popular appeal.

**ORGANIZED CRIME —** A Senate special committee to investigate organized crime in interstate commerce, headed by Senator Kefauver, began its hearings around the country in May, 1950, attracting a huge television audience. It found "shocking" corruption and recommended the legalization of wiretapping and a reform of state and local laws. Organized-crime too, is the subject of recurrent investigations, of which the most spectacular recent example was that in 1963 at which Joseph M. Valachi, a Costa Nostra operative, testified.

**I.T.T.—**Hearings that began in February, 1972, on the nomination of Richard K. Kleindienst as Attorney General soon developed into an examination of the relationship between the Justice Department and the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, specially, allegations of a "deal" that would allow an antitrust suit to be dropped in exchange for an I.T.T. contribution to the Republican National Convention. A special subcommittee flew to Denver to take testimony from Mrs. Dita Beard, an I.T.T. lobbyist, at her hospital bedside. Mr. Kleindienst was eventually approved.