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Watergate Probe Halts For a Week

Washington

The Senate Watergate committee yesterday canceled its hearings this week so they would not detract from the talks here between President Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev.

The action delays until next Tuesday public testimony by John W. Dean III, the former White House counsel who is said to have intimate knowledge of White House efforts to cover up facts in the Watergate case.

According to Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., the committee's chairman, the decision to postpone the hearings came not at the request of the White House but at the suggestion of the Senate leadership.

Democratic leader Mike Mansfield of Montana and Republican Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania wrote a joint letter to Ervin yesterday that a week's delay in the hearings might permit Mr. Nixon and Brezhnev to "achieve results which would be beneficial not only to our two countries but, hopefully, to all mankind."

Ervin (Dem - N.C.) said

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that he agreed to the postponement "with some degree of reluctance," adding that "I think there may be wisdom in their suggestion.

"I can see why the President's attention might be distracted by the Watergate investigation while he's trying to negotiate an arms control agreement," Ervin said.

The only one of the seven committee members who voted against the postponement was Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (Rep - Conn.).

He said he felt "strongly that, whereas the Brezhnev visit is important, this particular exercise in democracy is important also.

"I don't see why the two can't move along together. They might give an idea to Brezhnev of the strength of our kind of government," he said.

Mansfield said that he had initiated the postponement of the hearings on his own. He had not, he emphasized, discussed the matter with the White House or with anyone else outside of Congress.

According to the account provided by Mansfield and an aide to Scott, Mansfield called Scott about 2 p.m.,

and the two of them drafted the letter.

About an hour later, the letter was delivered to Ervin and Senator Howard H. Baker (Rep-Tenn.), the committee's ranking Republican, as the committee was meeting in a closed session with Dean.

Ervin read the letter to the committee and the committee, after a brief discussion, voted to postpone the hearings for a week.

According to a Senate source close to the investigation, Dean was pleased with the delay. He had already asked the senators to give him more time to "prepare" his testimony, but, until the Mansfield-Scott letter was received, the request had been denied.

Mansfield was asked why he had not acted sooner to cancel this week's hearings, since the Brezhnev visit and the probability that it would coincide with the Watergate hearings had been known for months.

"It didn't strike me until this morning," he replied.

"I wasn't thinking of the President. I was thinking of the country and our responsibility up here."

New York Times