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Watergate Hearing Put Off for a Week

Mansfield Acted to Aid Summit Talks

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WASHINGTON, June 18—

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

The action delays until next Tuesday public testimony by

Text of the Mansfield-Scott letter is on Page 18.

John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, who is said to have intimate knowledge of White House efforts to cover up the 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.

In another development, the special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox, disclosed a "general" inquiry into laws relating to subpoenas of a President in a criminal case.

The Democratic leader, Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, and the Republican leader, Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, wrote a joint letter to Senator Ervin today, saying that a week's delay in the hearings might permit the President

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and the Soviet leader to "achieve results which would be beneficial not only to our two countries but, hopefully, to all mankind."

Senator Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat, said that he had 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," Senator Ervin declared.

The only one of the seven

committee members who voted against the postponement was Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut.

He said that 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," the Connecticut Senator added.

In an interview this afternoon, Senator 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 Senator Mansfield and an aide to Senator Scott, Senator Mansfield called Senator Scott at about 2 P.M., and the two of them drafted the letter.

About an hour later, the letter was delivered to Senator Ervin and Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the committee's ranking Republican, as the committee was meeting in a closed session with Mr. Dean.

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

Pressure Reported

Mr. Dean and his attorneys were sent outside the meeting room during the debate over whether to delay the hearings. One Senate source said that the former counsel had seemed primed for the beginning of his testimony and was disappointed over the delay.

A committee lawyer said that Senator Mansfield had informed committee members that he was under a good deal of pressure from other Senators to cancel this week's testimony. The lawyer said that the committee's members were under similar pressure.

The lawyer said that he did not know and that the members themselves were not sure whether the pressure had been generated by the White House.

Senator 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 about for months.

"It didn't strike me until this morning," the Democratic leader replied.

"I wasn't thinking of the President. I was thinking of the country and our responsibility up here," the Senator said, explaining his decision to

seek the postponement of the hearings.

Later, on the Senate floor, Senator Mansfield declared that "this is a momentous week in the history of the republic." There were "demonstrations of all kinds going on," he said, and the more he thought about it the more he came to the conclusion that "it would be in the best interest of the republic" to seek a short delay in the public hearings.

Senator Baker, in another interview, aid emphatically that the delay in Mr. Dean's testimony had nothing to do with any information the former White House aide had supplied in recent days.

Mr. Dean was interviewed by committee staff members for five hours Saturday. In his closed session with the committee today, he was asked no questions about the evidence he was prepared to give.

During the time Mr. Dean was in the meeting, his attorneys argued that the publicity from the hearings might damage Mr. Dean's chances for a fair trial if he were indicted in the Watergate case. Committee lawyers said that the argument was intended to lay a foundation for an appeal if Mr. Dean were convicted on criminal charges.

Another purpose of the meeting, according to Senators who were there, was to determine whether Mr. Dean had any evidence that would endanger the national security if he presented it in public, and whether the President's former counsel would refuse to answer any questions on the grounds of executive privilege or an attorney-client relationship with the President.

These matters were not resolved today, and the Senators are planning to meet in another closed session with Mr. Dean next Monday.

TEXT OF THE LETTER

We have been discussing the fact that the hearings of the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities and the official visit of Secretary General Leonid I. Brezhnev are both occurring during the same week.

After giving consideration to this duality of events, recognizing the importance of each, we have come to the conclusion that it is a part of our responsibility as the joint leaders of the United States Senate to request, most regretfully, that the Select Committee postpone its hearings until the conclusion of the state visit to this country by Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev.

It is not an easy decision for us to make because both the hearings and the visit are being conducted with the best interests of the country in mind, but it is our considered judgment that a delay of one week would not jeopardize the hearings and that one week might give President Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev the opportunity to reconcile differences, arrive at mutual agreements, and in the field of foreign policy, be able to achieve results which would be beneficial not only to our two countries but, hopefully, to all mankind.

We would appreciate your consideration of this request and as early a response as possible.