

Watergate Panel Asks Staff to Explore Possibility of Meeting With Nixon

White House Is Silent On Senators' Proposal

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 6—The Senate Watergate committee asked its staff today to discuss with the White House whether President Nixon would be willing to meet with the committee's members and, if so, under what conditions.

Samuel Dash, the committee's chief counsel, said tonight that he had been unable to reach two of Mr. Nixon's chief legal advisers—Leonard Garment, the President's counsel, and J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., special counsel—and would try again tomorrow.

Gerald L. Warren, the deputy White House press secretary, would not comment on the committee's proposal and refused to confirm or deny that Mr. Nixon was considering a meeting with the committee.

One ranking White House official indicated tonight, however, that he doubted Mr. Nixon would consider meeting with the committee until the question of the White House tape recordings was resolved.

At a closed session this morning, the committee arrived at what its chairman, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, called a "general consensus" that the approach to the White House should be made. No vote was taken on the matter.

Confrontation Avoided

The committee has never subpoenaed Mr. Nixon to testify because there is some doubt that he could be compelled to appear under the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers. The committee members have been reluctant to force such a confrontation.

But, since the committee was formed, Senator Ervin has said that he would welcome an opportunity to question the President and would agree to virtually any ground rules that Mr. Nixon set.

Other Senators, including Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the ranking Republican on the committee, have made similar statements, and Senator Ervin and Senator Baker said today that their positions had not changed.

In the last week, a number of influential politicians, including Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, have suggested that Mr. Nixon appear publicly before the committee to answer questions about his role in the Watergate scandal.

Weicker Proposal

The committee's agreement this morning was prompted by a proposal made at a meeting last week by Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut.

Under his proposal, the committee members would meet with Mr. Nixon at the White House. The President would not be placed under oath, but a transcript of the interrogation would be made public.

One committee official said today that he thought the committee would benefit regardless of whether Mr. Nixon agreed to a meeting. If the President accepts, the official said, the committee members could get answers to their questions. If the President refuses, he added, it would still be a victory for the committee from a public relations standpoint.

Some Concessions

Another official — a Democrat — said that he thought a face-to-face meeting with the President might prove embarrassing to the committee. The senators, the official said, would surely be deferential to Mr. Nixon and would be subject

to criticism afterward for not having been more aggressive in their interrogation.

The President has made some concessions to the Senate committee, such as requiring his aides and former aides to testify without invoking executive privilege.

But Mr. Nixon has refused to turn over tape recordings and a number of documents that the committee has subpoenaed. The United States District Court here ruled last month that it did not have jurisdiction to compel the President to comply with subpoenas, and the matter is now before the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

At the committee's public session today, it heard testimony from witnesses sought out by the Republican staff who told of demonstrations against Mr. Nixon and other Republicans during the Presidential campaign last year.

No Ties to McGovern

None of the witnesses was able to tie the demonstrations to Senator George McGovern's campaign.

The committee has heard considerable evidence about how the Nixon campaign paid agents to disrupt Democratic candidates.

In addition, Senator Baker placed into the committee's record about 40 sworn affidavits concerning other acts against Republicans.

One of the affidavits was from Dr. John C. Lungren of Long Beach, Calif., who was once one of Mr. Nixon's personal physicians.

He repeated allegations that he made publicly last spring that his office was broken into in September, 1972, and that the contents of Mr. Nixon's file were strewn on the floor.

Dr. Lungren has said that he last examined Mr. Nixon in 1969 and found him to be in "perfect health."