

Nixon Said To Dispute Richardson

By Robert Barkdoll
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President Nixon disputes certain parts of former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson's sworn testimony concerning the ouster of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, several Republican senators said last night.

At issue, they said, is the position Richardson originally took on whether Cox should be fired and on whether the special prosecutor should have been ordered to cease court efforts to obtain presidential tapes and documents.

There were reports in some quarters that Mr. Nixon, during a Wednesday night meeting with 14 GOP senators, accused Richardson of an outright lie and raised the question of whether the Senate Judiciary Committee would consider perjury action against him.

However, several senators—and the White House—said Mr. Nixon never used the word "lie" nor did he call for a perjury citation against his former Cabinet member.

But in this connection one senator quoted the President as saying at one point, almost in an aside: "Of course, you [the Senate] would never go after Richardson." The senator interpreted this to mean that Mr. Nixon felt the Senate was too kindly disposed toward Richardson to "go after" him.

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Sen. Paul J. Fannin (R-Ariz.) told United Press International that Mr. Nixon did not use the word "lie," nor did he "suggest anything about perjury."

Sen. Wallace Bennett (R-Utah) told UPI: "My memory is that the President was careful to say that Richardson's memory was bad or that he was mistaken. . . . The President said he thought Richardson had acted in his own self-interest, but he didn't condemn him for that."

Mr. Nixon and White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr., who sat in on the Wednesday meeting,

were said to have disputed Richardson's Senate Judiciary Committee testimony that he opposed ordering Cox to halt court efforts to obtain presidential documents.

According to one senator at the meeting, the Nixon-Haig version was that on Oct. 15, five days before Cox was fired, Richardson actually suggested that Cox be ordered not to seek judicial action to get any presidential tapes or documents.

Another senator said he recalled one point of dispute as this: that Haig and others felt Cox should be fired, and that Richardson—at least in the beginning—did not disassociate himself from this view. But Richardson became more and more reluctant to fire Cox as the last week wore on.

In response to inquiries Thursday night, the White House issued a statement which said in part:

"What the President told the senators was that there are several versions of the events that led up to the discharge of former Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and that Mr. Richardson was simply articulating one of those versions.

"Any suggestions that the President accused Mr. Richardson of lying or called for a Senate investigation involving perjury are simply not true."

Richardson said in a statement that he stood on his testimony and that there was no basis for any White House claim that he instigated the move to restrict Cox's activities.

Sen. Marlow W. Cook (R-Ky.) told The Washington Post that the issue also came up at a meeting Tuesday in response to a question from Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.).

"The President said that Elliot Richardson was on board all the way and that he did not know until . . . Saturday that he had changed his mind. . . . I turned to the President and looked right at him and said, 'Mr. President, if there is a discrepancy and you can establish it, you should do so because right now the people in this room are more in-

terested in you than Mr. Richardson."

One of the few senators who attended the Wednesday White House meeting and would talk on the record Thursday was Sen. Charles McC. Mathias (R-Md.), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"If there was a discrepancy between what was said [at the White House] Wednesday night and Richardson's Judiciary Committee testimony, it's a matter for the committee to resolve," Mathias said. He would not elaborate further on the perjury question.

Another senator, who insisted that he not be identified, said, "It was clear the President felt Richardson had not completely represented the [Cox] thing in the way the President or Haig recalled it."

"The President intimated

this could be a matter of memory on Richardson's part," the senator added. "But he stopped far short of saying Richardson was a liar."