

Ervin Won't Run for Re-Election in '74

By Lou Cannon

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Bible - quoting Sam Ervin, chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee, announced yesterday that he will not be a candidate for re-election in 1974.

Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat who has served in the Senate for 19 years, said that at 77 he is too old to complete another term.

"Since time takes a constantly accelerating toll of those of us who live for many years, it is simply not responsible for me to assume that my eye will remain undimmed and my neutral force stays unabated for so long a time," Ervin said.

Ervin, long considered the foremost constitutional expert

in the Senate, this year combined his legal knowledge with a homespun manner and an extraordinary pair of eyebrows to become national television hero during the Senate Watergate hearings.

He also became a favorite target of the White House, which had been encouraging opposition to him in next year's election.

Ervin was the No. 1 political target at a recent conference of Southern Republicans in Atlanta, where Rep. Wilmer (Vinegar Bend) Mizell, a former star pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals, all but announced his intention to oppose Ervin.

And Ervin was also certain of opposition within his own party primary. Tarheel native Henry Hall Wilson, president of the Chicago Board of Trade,

has announced his intention to run. State Attorney General Robert Morgan, another possible primary candidate, is now considered certain to seek the Democratic nomination. Other possible Democratic candidates in what is now a wide-open race include Rep. Richardson Preyer and former Rep. Nick Galifianakis.

North Carolina Gov. James E. Holshouser, an upset Republican winner in 1972, claimed recently that GOP polls showed Ervin vulnerable if he sought reelection.

Ervin partisans scoffed at these reports, contending that "Mr. Sam" could easily have been reelected.

Ervin himself said yesterday that his decision was not based either on Watergate or the probability of serious op-

position next year. He said that age was the main consideration and that he was announcing now as "a Christmas present" to his wife, "Miss Margaret." He also said that the "first thing I'm going to do is go fishing."

Characteristically, Ervin announced his decision at a small press conference in his office to which only North Carolina reporters were invited. Afterward he put out a statement which contained only one reference to Watergate, a compliment to members of his committee staff for investigation of "this great tragedy."

Ervin served one term in the house from 1946 to 1948 and was a member of the North Carolina Supreme Court when he was named senator.

He became a hero to liberals for his civil libertarian stands against "no knock" and preventive detention laws and for his investigation of Army spying on civilians.

But Ervin was looked upon in a different way during the civil rights battles of the late 1950s and early 1960s by those who later praised him. His biblical and Shakespearean quotations and flowing Southern rhetoric were invoked then in behalf of state's rights and against most civil rights proposals.

Within the Senate, Ervin's reputation as a man of fairness and legal scholarship grew steadily. This reputation played a major role in Majority Leader Mike Mansfield's decision to select him as chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee.

One other consideration was that Ervin's age made it unlikely that he would use the committee to further national political ambitions.

By announcing his resignation at this time Ervin will make it more difficult for the White House to promote a political candidacy in North Carolina based on opposition to the Watergate committee.

The committee's final report is due next Feb. 28. After that it is to go out of existence.