

# Panel Set To Vote on Hearings

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Senate select Watergate committee chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) said yesterday that he will recommend that the committee vote today to resume its hearings next week.

The committee's seven members, who are divided on the question, are to meet behind closed doors today to decide whether further hearings are necessary to inquire into campaign contributions made to President Nixon by the nation's milk producers in 1972 and by billionaire Howard Hughes in 1969 and 1970.

Mr. Nixon's close friend, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo, who received the \$100,000 in contributions from Hughes, has been proposed by the committee staff as a key witness if the hearings resume.

Several committee sources predicted yesterday that today's closed meeting would be the most rancorous in the committee's year of existence. Two Republican sources suggested that the vote could be 4 to 3 in favor of resuming hearings. Previously, the committee's votes have usually wound up unanimous despite differences of opinion.

According to informed accounts of the evidence gathered by the committee staff during more than two months of investigation, further hearings would not necessarily produce sensational testimony or much information beyond what has already been reported in the last several months in the press and on television about the milk and Hughes contributions.

Ervin was briefed Monday afternoon by chief committee counsel Samuel Dash and other members on the staff on the evidence that has been gathered. Ervin told a reporter yesterday that when the committee meets today, "I would recommend to the committee that there be some hearings."

Although Ervin is believed to have the support of the committee's three other Democratic members, some aides to these senators said the outcome of the vote could depend on how strong Ervin's recommendation to the committee is and how impressive the senators find the testimony.

Only one committee member, Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.), has come out firmly against continued hearings. The two other minority members, Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), the committee's vice chairman, and Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.) have said that they still must be persuaded that the evidence is worth presenting.

Ervin declined yesterday to say how many days of hearings he thinks the committee should hold. He said that decision was for the committee to make. Informal discussions among the staff and committee members have ranged from a high of 12 days to a minimum of six days of public testimony.

A decision by the committee to hold 12 days of hearings could take the public sessions to the end of February if the committee continues its practice of having only three days of hearings a week. Congress is scheduled to recess for 10 days in February for Lincoln's birthday.

Ervin said yesterday that "it may be necessary for the committee to ask the Senate for an extension of the Feb. 28 deadline for the committee's final report and recommendations. Other sources were less cautious, saying that an extension of the deadline is a virtual certainty."