

Ervin Was Right To Hold It Up

THE WATERGATE HEARINGS of the Senate select committee were about to start up again as the nation's leading daytime television diversion when suddenly over the weekend the word came down from Senator Ervin that they would be indefinitely deferred. Yesterday the United Press reported that they may never again be held, in public at least, and this may therefore be an obituary note.

It is bad form to speak ill of the dead, and so we won't; however, it is possible to speak well of the chairman's decision. He said the indefinite delay had been agreed upon in order to make sure that no prejudice was done to former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans. They are about to go to trial for conspiracy to obstruct justice in a case involving a \$200,000 1972 campaign contribution. It is hard to see how the Watergate hearings could have helped prejudicing Mitchell's case at least, since the committee had its sights on the \$100,000 Howard Hughes campaign contribution of 1972 and the much more substantial pledge of the Associated Milk Producers, and Mitchell had played a role in these matters.

ONE CAN ONLY PRAISE the uncustomary reticence of Senator Weicker of Connecticut, who led the argument last week in meetings of the committee to put off the hearings out of concern for the course of justice. The Democrats on the committee turned him down at the time, 4 to 3, but later, when the U.S. Attorney for New York asked for postponement in the interest of justice, the request became irresistible.

What the public now awaits and expects is the Senate committee's final report: what lessons it learned about campaign spending in 1972 and what it recommends for bettering the law and the system.