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**ERVIN PANEL ENDS  
PUBLIC HEARINGS  
OVER WATERGATE**

**Senator Says Unit Doesn't  
Want to Hinder House  
Impeachment Process**

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 19 —  
The Senate Watergate Committee decided today not to hold further public hearings.

The committee, which burst into the national spotlight last spring with spectacular televised sessions, backed off the center stage this afternoon without fanfare.

The chairman, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., who became a celebrity during the height of the hearings, emerged from a half-hour private committee meeting and, standing in a bleak corridor in the Capitol, read a three-page statement to reporters.

Meanwhile, Chief Judge John J. Sirica said that he had obtained an agreement among lawyers from all sides to halt public statements over findings of the court-appointed panel of electronics experts that is investigating subpoenaed Presidential tapes. Page 14.]

The Watergate hearings are being ended, Mr. Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat, said, because "the committee believes that it should be careful not to interfere unduly with the ongoing impeachment process of the House Judiciary Committee or the criminal cases which will soon be prosecuted by the special prosecutor, on which the attention of the country appears now to be focused."

**Panel's Life Extended**

Senator Ervin said that, between now and the end of May, the committee would continue to investigate various allegations, pursue its court case to gain access to the White House tape recordings and prepare its final report. Later, by voice vote, the Senate agreed to extend the committee's life until May 28.

All seven Senators agreed to terminate the public proceedings. However, Senator Edward J. Gurney, Republican of Florida, voted against the decision to continue investigations and to delay issuing the final report for three months.

Samuel Dash, the committee's chief counsel, said that in the weeks ahead the panel would release transcripts of private sessions with witnesses in matters that have not been the

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

subject of public hearings.

These matters include the circumstances surrounding the \$100,000 cash contribution given by agents of Howard R. Hughes, the billionaire, to President Nixon's friend, Charles G. Rebozo, and the contributions by the dairy industry to the Nixon re-election campaign.

Mr. Ervin said that Mr. Rebozo, who has refused to comply with a committee subpoena of certain documents, would be called to testify under oath before the committee's investigators.

For nearly three months—from last May 17 to Aug. 7—the Watergate hearings, broadcast live on commercial television during the day and replayed on public television at night, captured the attention of much of the nation.

The seven Senators on the committee and such witnesses as John W. Dean 3d, John N. Mitchell, John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman became familiar faces from coast to coast.

After recessing through the rest of August and most of September, the committee resumed public hearings briefly last fall, but the testimony was much less dramatic. As interest in the proceedings waned, they were dropped by the television networks.

**Hinged on Mitchell Trial**

Since Thanksgiving, Senator Ervin and Mr. Dash have insisted repeatedly that public hearings would resume and that they would delve into the Hughes-Rebozo matter and the contributions from milk producers.

On Jan. 23, by a straight party-line vote, the panel agreed to hold two weeks of public sessions. The four Democratic Senators voted for the additional hearings and the Three Republicans voted against them.

Three days later, Senator Ervin announced that the planned hearings would be postponed until a jury was

selected in the New York trial of Mr. Mitchell, the former Attorney General, and Maurice H. Stans, the former Commerce Secretary.

According to committee officials, the decision today not to hold more hearings was the result of one key factor: Senator Ervin changed his mind.

These officials noted that the other three Democrats on the panel had been none too enthusiastic about further hearings. But Mr. Ervin wanted them, these sources said, and, as often happens in the Senate, the Democratic Senators acceded to their chairman's wishes.

The officials speculated that there were two principal reasons for Mr. Ervin's change of heart.

The first, they said, was that the investigators had developed little consequential information that had not already been reported.

The second, they said, was a statement Feb. 8 by Judge Gerhard A. Gesell of the United States District Court here. In dismissing the committee's suit to gain access to White House tapes, Judge Gesell praised the work of the committee thus far but declared:

"Surely the time has come to question whether it is in the public interest for the criminal investigative aspects of its work to go forward in the blazing atmosphere of ex parte publicity directed to issues that are immediately and intimately related to pending criminal proceedings."

Since further Watergate indictments are expected by the end of this month, Senator Ervin, a former judge, was said to have been impressed by that reasoning.

Nonetheless, he was said to be adamant about appealing Judge Gesell's decision to dismiss the suit because of potential pretrial publicity. A notice of appeal is expected to be filed this week.

It was considered likely that the committee's lawyers would argue that, since no more public hearings were planned, the possibility of publicity that might damage the rights of defendants would be limited.