

New Testimony in The Mitchell Trial

New York

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell was notified in January, 1972, that international financier Robert L. Vesco, then under investigation by the government, was considering a "substantial contribution" to the Nixon presidential campaign that year.

In his second day of testimony as the government's star witness and granted immunity from prosecution, Harry L. Sears said that Mitchell was informed of Vesco's proposed contribution at a meeting with Sears in Mitchell's office in the Justice Department building.

Vesco at that time was being vigorously investigated by the staff of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Mitchell and his code-fendant, former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans, are accused of attempting to impede a federal fraud investigation of Vesco in exchange for his secret \$200,000 contribution to the Nixon

re-election campaign and then lying about it to a grand jury. The payment allegedly was made on April 10, 1972.

Sears, a prominent New Jersey Republican and friend of both Mitchell and Vesco, is accused of being one of the bagmen in the contribution.

Under questioning yesterday, Sears said he provided information to federal prosecutors in the case during a conference with them this past weekend, but he was not able to recollect with certainty yesterday whether that meeting with Mitchell occurred January 12 or a week later.

Prosecutor John R. Wing asked Judge Lee P. Gagliardi to declare Sears a hostile witness. The judge refused, but gave Wing more freedom in examining the witness.

Sears testified that he had a number of conversations with Vesco in late December, 1971, and early January, 1972. "At one point Vesco said he would like to give

as much as a half a million dollars," he said.

Sears testified that Vesco wanted to make the contribution "big enough to be recognized."

"He wanted to get a diplomatic passport which he said would give him status and certain privileges with U.S. embassies," Sears said.

Sears testified that he had informed Mitchell that Vesco had been a big enough contributor in the 1968 Nixon election campaign to purchase a box at the inaugural ball that year.

Earlier, the name of John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's former domestic affairs adviser, was brought into the trial.

Sears said Ehrlichman had sent a memo to Mitchell, asking the attorney general to check with various U.S. embassies on Vesco's behalf. Sears said that Vesco wanted "a good word put in for Bob Vesco at the U.S. embassies in Luxembourg, Amsterdam, Beirut and Hong Kong."

Sears said that Vesco

wanted it to be known that he was "a reputable American citizen" in the event enquiries were made at these embassies regarding his various business enterprises in those countries.

United Press