

Nixon Given

Blame for Probe Delay

Reuter

President Nixon could have uncovered the facts of the Watergate break-in long ago by questioning his key aides, Sen. Sam Ervin Jr., chairman of the Senate Watergate committee, declared yesterday.

He pointed out that obstruction of justice is an impeachable offense. But the North Carolina Democrat said he had not formed any opinions on whether or not the President had committed an impeachable offense.

In a speech in the Senate, Ervin, regarded as one of the leading congressional experts on the Constitution, said both willful obstruction of justice and fraudulent evasion of federal income tax payments by a President were impeachable offenses.

He said that while he would not conclude that the President had committed an impeachable offense unless evidence convinced him beyond a reasonable doubt, he had reached two conclusions:

- That the President had needlessly prolonged for himself and the nation the agony of Watergate by withholding tape recordings and documents from the Senate Watergate committee, the Watergate grand jury, and the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee which is conducting a preliminary impeachment investigation.

- And "The President could have spared himself and the nation the agony of Watergate if he had acted at the beginning with the forthrightness which ought to characterize the occupant of his high office."