

Colson's Testimony on Watergate Is Seen Having Wide Implications for President

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WASHINGTON — The testimony former presidential aide Charles W. Colson has promised Watergate prosecutors and the House Judiciary Committee is likely to have wide implications for President Nixon.

"Chuck will tell the truth, warts and all," says Colson's lawyer, David Shapiro. "There will be some pluses for the President and some minuses," he adds.

Interviews with various sources indicate that among the pluses will be his potential testimony on the President's knowledge of the Watergate cover-up and on the White House decision to raise milk price supports in March 1971.

However, the minuses column, in addition to damaging Mr. Nixon directly could add to recent controversies about Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who has been Mr. Nixon's major asset in his fight to remain in office. And they might also prove damaging regarding Mr. Nixon and the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. case.

On the plus side, Colson's expected to say that he hasn't any knowledge that President Nixon actually knew about the cover-up before he claims he did—March 21, 1973. While Colson will say he warned Mr. Nixon in February 1973 that reelection committee officials were involved, he will add that he didn't have any firm evidence to give the President and that Mr. Nixon didn't have any reason to believe him rather than his former campaign director, John Mitchell.

As for the milk price decision, Colson will say that he believes it was based, essentially, on political considerations, that is, winning the farm bloc vote, and wasn't related to the dairy lobby's pledge of cash support for Mr. Nixon's 1972 reelection drive.

Ellsberg Affair

However, Colson, who begins serving a one to three year prison term on July 8 for an act he says President Nixon urged him to commit, can shed new light on the motivations behind the White House plumbers activities against Pentagon Papers figure Daniel Ellsberg.

Colson had pleaded guilty earlier this month to obstructing justice by disseminating damaging information about Mr. Ellsberg, and his attorney when Mr. Ellsberg was under indictment for stealing the Pentagon Papers. At his sentencing Friday, Colson told the court that the President "on numerous occasions" urged him to disseminate damaging information about Mr. Ellsberg. Then he added: "Daniel Ellsberg was viewed as a serious threat to the security of the U.S. in that he had had access to very sensitive information which it was feared he might disclose. The President, Dr. Kissinger, myself and others feared that his action would encourage others to do the same."

Colson thus implied that Mr. Kissinger was among those in the White House who deemed it necessary to dethrone Mr. Ellsberg as a martyr of the antiwar left, so that Ellsberg emulators wouldn't similarly seek to spill security secrets. And in private statements Colson has said that Mr. Kissinger urged the President to authorize extra-legal measures against Mr. Ellsberg—measures that led to Colson's journey toward jail.

Description of Kissinger

"Kissinger was frantic about Ellsberg," according to one source who's privy to Colson's statements. "As it will ultimately come out, it was Kissinger who exorcised the President to the point of frenzy. His exact expression to the President was, 'That man (Ellsberg) must be destroyed.'"

This description of Mr. Kissinger's fury squares with accounts Colson gave earlier

to White House staffers. "Chuck once made a point of telling me how the President was riding him to 'get' Ellsberg," one former aide recounts, "and I remember him saying he was getting calls from Kissinger, too."

A State Department spokesman didn't have any immediate comment.

If these accounts are correct, Mr. Kissinger's prestige could become tied to the national security scaffolding that Mr. Nixon has erected to explain certain crimes by White House aides, such as the attempted burglary of Mr. Ellsberg's psychiatric files. And if that scaffolding should collapse Mr. Kissinger mightn't manage to avoid the debris.

Ellsberg's Character

Indeed, the House Judiciary Committee is gathering evidence that White House attention toward Mr. Ellsberg wasn't intended solely to plug security leaks. The since repentant Colson, for one, viewed the prosecution of Mr. Ellsberg mostly as a political event, one that could help the White House gain partisan advantage—and he so wrote in an "option paper" prepared for Mr. Nixon that could become a centerpiece of the impeachment inquiry.

The Colson document mentions security concern only glancingly, if at all. It dwells instead on the benefits accruing from a prosecution that would destroy the public's perception of Mr. Ellsberg's character and link him to Mr. Nixon's liberal Democratic opposition.

Significantly, Mr. Nixon asked chief political operative Colson to prepare the option paper some time before Mr. Ellsberg's indictment for unauthorized possession of the Pentagon Papers. And Colson's reply, transmitted through White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman, is dated June 25, 1971, three days before a Los Angeles grand jury formally accused Mr. Ellsberg of a crime.

"Counter Memo"

The tenor of Colson's advice to the President is reflected best in a counter-memo written on July 9 by Douglas Hallett, then a 22-year-old Colson aide. Mr. Ellsberg should be prosecuted by the Justice Department if a valid legal case exists, young Mr. Hallett wrote. But the White House should shun involvement.

"What I'm concerned about is making sure nobody tries to think up strategies to try to keep this issue alive and exploit it for our benefit. Such a strategy would be, in my view, ethically questionable. As with most unethical strategies it would be very prone to backfiring on us . . . and inevitably damage the President. He's supposed to be above this kind of crap."

Mr. Hallett has some reason to believe that his memo reached the president's desk. In early August, though, Mr. Nixon met with Colson to discuss defendant Ellsberg's New York lawyer, Leonard Boudin. Soon thereafter Colson aide E. Howard Hunt began gathering derogatory information about Mr. Boudin.

Plumbers' Activities

At that time, Hunt held membership in the White House special investigations unit, or plumbers, a four-man group that had been established with Mr. Nixon's approval

in the week following June publication of the Pentagon Papers; The unit's "principal purpose," according to Mr. Nixon, "was to stop security leaks and to investigate other security matters."

"I did not authorize and had no knowledge of any illegal means to be used to achieve this goal," Mr. Nixon further explained in his statement of May 22, 1973. "However, because of the emphasis I put on the crucial importance of protecting the national security, I can understand how highly motivated individuals could have felt justified in engaging in specific activities that I would have disapproved had they been brought to my attention."

But plumber Hunt's assignment wasn't targeted against potential security leaks. He was aiming, instead, at the attorney for a defendant in a criminal case. And his assignment resulted in a long memorandum attacking lawyer Boudin that's described as "scurrilous and libelous" by the Watergate special prosecution force.

It's noteworthy that Hunt gave copies of his work to two fellow plumbers—Egil Krogh, an assistant to domestic affairs adviser John Ehrlichman; and to David Young, a member of National Security adviser Kissinger's staff.

In turn, Mr. Young passed a copy of Hunt's work to Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Ehrlichman sent it approvingly to Colson. With the Hunt memo Mr. Ehrlichman sent a cover memo of his own. It said the attack on Mr. Ellsberg's lawyer might be a useful response to "the recent request that we get something out of Ellsberg"—meaning the President's request to Mr. Colson in early August.

ITT Matter Cited

On the ITT matter, Colson will say, if asked, that the President failed to take any action after being warned in March 1972 that high administration officials apparently committed perjury and other crimes during the confirmation hearings on Richard Kleindienst's nomination to be attorney general.

Colson first broached his warnings in a conversation with Mr. Nixon and then followed up with a memo addressed to Mr. Haldeman and intended for the President. That memo was publicly released last August by the Senate Watergate Committee.

Instead of asking Colson to dig further into the matter, the President told Colson to take some time off. Colson then took the first three-day vacation he had had while working at the White House.