

LaRue Testimony Cited as Support

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The House Judiciary Committee heard testimony yesterday about two telephone calls that President Nixon's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, said tends to show that the President was not involved in payment of hush money to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.

Members said Frederick C. LaRue, an official at the Committee for the Re-election

of the President who ordered payment of \$75,000 to Hunt on March 21, 1973, told the committee in closed session that he acted after receiving a morning telephone call from then-White House Counsel John W. Dean, III.

St. Clair contends that the time of Dean's call is important because it was before, not after, the late-morning meeting at which Dean described to Mr. Nixon the

hush money payments and the need for more to keep Hunt from talking about White House involvement in the Watergate break-in.

St. Clair's contention is that this proves that Dean set in motion events that led to the payment before he talked with the President, and that this suggests the President was not involved.

Some members understood LaRue to testify flatly yesterday that the call

from Dean came in the morning but did not fix the date. Others said he testified that to the best of his recollection the Dean call came on the morning of March 21, 1973. In testimony before the Senate Watergate committee LaRue had been unsure whether the call came on the 21st or a day earlier.

Rep. Jerome R. Waldie (D-Calif.) said that in his opinion "nothing was greatly clarified" by LaRue's testi-

for Nixon

mony as to the time of day he received Dean's telephone call.

Mitchell will testify today and will be asked to clear up further confusion left in the minds of some members as to when LaRue then talked by telephone with Mitchell and got approval for the \$75,000 payment to Hunt.

Hunt's demand for more money was sent to Dean who relayed it to LaRue,

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with the statement that he, Dean, wasn't in the money business and that if LaRue needed clearance he might call John N. Mitchell, former Attorney General and LaRue's former boss as director of the Committee for the Re-Election of the president.

LaRue told the committee, members said, that he called Mitchell that afternoon. He said that he told Mitchell he understood the money was needed for legal fees, and that Mitchell said in that case the payment could be made.

LaRue told the impeachment inquiry that Mitchell made no mention of having received a message from then-White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Jaldeman about the payment.

Haldeman attended part of the meeting that morning during which Dean told President Nixon about the hush money. The President indicated in several statements, including, "For Christ's sake, get it," that he thought hush money should be raised and paid to prevent blackmail of the White House.

It is known that Haldeman telephoned Mitchell in New York shortly after the meeting with the President. Haldeman said the purpose of the call was to ask Mitchell

to come to Washington the next day for a meeting with the top White House staff on the Watergate problem.

St. Clair contends that the fact that Mitchell's conversation with LaRue conveyed no hint of a Haldeman message to approve the Hunt payment is further evidence that the President was not involved in the payment of hush money.

St. Clair's theory is that the only possible impeachable offense the committee could find would be the Watergate cover-up—specifically, involvement in the payment of hush money to Hunt on March 21, 1973. But his emphasis on the two telephone calls ignores the White House version of the transcript of the Nixon-Dean conversation that day during which the President several times appeared to approve payment of hush money.

St. Clair spent the morning at the Supreme Court arguing that President Nixon should not be ordered to turn over tapes of 64 White House Watergate conversations to Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski for use in Watergate cover-up trials beginning in September. Then he went across the street to the House Judiciary Committee hearing, which lasted about five hours.

LaRue has pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiracy to obstruct justice because of his role in the cover-up.

Today the committee will hear from William O. Bittman, Hunt's lawyer. Later it will hear from Dean. The committee's schedule has slipped a little more, but it still plans to vote on whether to recommend impeachment of the President before the end of the month.

The committee today will also release the first of more than 7,000 pages of

materials that it has been examining during its closed-session fact-finding inquiry.

This first installment is transcripts of eight taped White House conversations for which there is both a committee transcript and a White House transcript. The committee staff has said there are many differences between the two versions, at least partly because the committee has better equipment to listen to the tapes. Many of the differences have been published as the

result of leaks from committee members.

Later this week the committee plans to release about 3,000 pages of material on the Watergate break-in and cover-up. Next week it plans to release materials it examined on other allegations against the President, such as dairy industry contributions, the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. antitrust case settlement, alleged misuse of federal agencies for political purposes and the Ellsberg break-in.