

Watergate big shots go on trial

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman, and John N. Mitchell, men who once helped manage the affairs of the nation, go on trial Tuesday charged with criminal conspiracy in the Watergate cover-up.

With three other defendants, they stand accused of trying to hide responsibility for the scandal that felled a president.

The trial promises to flesh out an epic political story with information never provided elsewhere, coming mainly from the secret tape hoard of Richard Nixon's White House.

Barring 11th-hour legal maneuverings, U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica will begin selecting a jury Tuesday.

The former president is not a defendant in the case and he has been pardoned for any federal crime during his presidency that the trial may expose. But he will have a major role — as a witness if his health permits or through his taped conversations if it doesn't.

The six defendants are charged with being partners in crime; of using "deceit, craft, trickery and dishonest means" to prevent investigators from learning about White House involvement in the break-in and bugging of Democratic party headquarters in the Watergate office complex.

To accomplish that, the grand jury charged, the conspirators altered and destroyed documents, lied, promised executive clemency and paid hush money.

Never before have so many important former government officials gone on trial at the same time. They are:

Mitchell, charged with conspiring to obstruct jus-

tice, obstructing justice and four counts of lying.

Haldeman and Ehrlichman, charged with conspiring to obstruct justice, obstructing justice and three counts of lying,

Robert C. Mardian, 51, charged with conspiring to obstruct justice.

Kenneth W. Parkinson, 47, charged with conspiring to obstruct justice and obstruction of justice.

Gordon C. Strachan, 31, charged with conspiring to obstruct justice, obstructing justice and one count of perjury.

Each charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison — a possible 30 years for Mitchell, 25 for Haldeman and Ehrlichman, 10 for Parkinson, 5 for Mardian and 15 for Strachan. Fines for the various counts range from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

The grand jury had included one other defendant in its 50-page indictment March 1, former Nixon special counsel Charles W. Colson. But Colson, indicted with Ehrlichman in the Ellsberg burglary case, pleaded guilty to a different charge and went to prison for 1-3 years. In return, the cover-up and Ellsberg charges were dropped.

Strachan, too, stands a good chance of being severed from the trial of the other five. Special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski joined Strachan's lawyer last week in asking such separation.

Strachan's attorney had been pressing since spring for dismissal of the charges, claiming the government was violating its promise not to use Strachan's own words against him. Conceding that it's a close legal question, Jaworski said it would be better for the trial to proceed without Strachan until the matter is cleared up.

Sirica is expected to rule on that matter on Monday.

To date, 51 individuals have been charged with Watergate-related crimes, although the cases involved

such diverse areas as illegal campaign contributions and dirty tricks as well as the actual Watergate break-in and bugging.

But this trial is to be the

for conspiracy

centerpiece of all the effort put in by the special prosecution force.

As the lawyers for all six men have claimed, never before in American juris-

prudence has there been so much widespread knowledge about a case and the involvement of defendants about to come to trial.

The witness list submitted

this week

by prosecution and defense lawyers reads like a "Who's Who" of Watergate. But star billing will go to the tape recordings Nixon made surreptitiously in the White

House, and only the appearance of Nixon himself would surpass it.

He has been subpoenaed by both Ehrlichman and the government.