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**WATERGATE TRIAL  
WILL BEGIN TODAY  
FOR 5 DEFENDANTS**

**Sirica Severs the Strachan  
Case From the Others  
Accused of Cover-Up**

**IMMUNITY ISSUE RAISED**

**Doctor Says Nixon Cannot  
Make Trip to Testify for  
One to Three Months**

By **LESLEY OELSNER**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30—  
Judge John J. Sirica cleared the way today for the start of the Watergate cover-up trial tomorrow at 9:30 A.M. in Federal District Court by severing the case of a defendant whose prosecution had become involved in a legal tangle.

Judge Sirica ordered a separate, later trial for the defendant, Gordon C. Strachan, rather than, as was his alternative, delay the trial of the five other defendants with pretrial hearings on the questions surrounding Mr. Strachan's case. The questions basically involved the grants of immunity given to Mr. Strachan last year in return for his testimony.

Meanwhile, in Long Beach, Calif., former President Richard M. Nixon's doctors said that he would not be medically fit to travel to Washington to testify in the Watergate trial for from one to three months. [Page 18.]

The judge, acting barely 24 hours before Mr. Strachan was to have taken his place in the courtroom alongside the other former White House and Nixon campaign aides accused in the cover-up, thus all but assured that the jury selection would begin as scheduled.

**Other Defendants**

The remaining defendants are John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General; John D. Ehrlichman, once President Nixon's chief domestic affairs adviser; H. R. Haldeman, Mr. Nixon's chief of staff and Mr. Strachan's former superior at the White House; Robert C. Mardian, a former Assistant Attorney General and political coordinator of the Committee for the re-election of the President, and Kenneth W. Parkinson, a lawyer for the committee.

But Judge Sirica's move, contained in a two-page written order, raised questions as to when, if ever, Mr. Strachan, a lawyer, would be tried.

James F. Neal, the assistant special Watergate prosecutor in charge of the cover-up case, said that Mr. Strachan could not be tried until the main trial



The New York Times  
**Gordon C. Strachan**

was completed—some three to five months, according to lawyers involved.

And, asked whether Mr. Strachan would be tried at all, Mr. Neal replied that he would not "guess."

Mr. Neal made his comments during a recess in an all-day, closed hearing held by Judge Sirica in final preparation for the trial.

The major subject of the hearing was the accuracy of transcripts that the prosecution had prepared of tape recordings, nearly all of them White House recordings, that it intends to submit as evidence at the trial.

Defense counsel have challenged the accuracy of the transcripts, as part of their policy of attacking each aspect of use of the tapes as evidence.

Mr. Haldeman was the only defendant at the hearing. He was tanned and healthy looking, the crew cut of his White House years grown into a longer, more fashionable style, and there was little but the Presidential tieclasp attached to his striped silk tie to distinguish him from the others in court for the day.

Mr. Haldeman was a participant in many of the tape recordings that the prosecution wants to use as evidence, and he came to court, presumably, to assist in his attorneys' discussion of the tapes.

**Strachan's Advice Recalled**

Mr. Strachan was one of the young, former White House aides who testified before a national television audience at the Senate Watergate committee's hearings last year. Before giving his testimony in which he marked, among other things, that he would advise young people to stay away from Washington, he had been given immunity, a promise that nothing he said would be used against him.

He had also been given immunity earlier by the original Watergate prosecutors. John F. Bray, Mr. Strachan's attorney, contends that his client's indictment in the Watergate case violates these grants of immunity.

Judge Sirica had previously ruled that this contention would be decided at a hearing after trial. The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit sustained this ruling on Sept. 20, but two of the judges strongly suggested in their opinions that a pretrial hearing would be more advisable.

The special Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, then asked Judge Sirica to sever Mr. Strachan's case and hold a pretrial hearing. Judge Sirica granted that request today, citing the remarks of the appellate judges.