

Sirica Fears Effect On Rights of Appeal If Tapes Are Played

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WASHINGTON, March 6 (AP) —United States District Judge John J. Sirica said today that he feared that the appeal rights of the four men convicted in the Watergate cover-up trial might be jeopardized if he permitted television and radio networks to broadcast the White House Watergate tapes.

He gave no firm indication, however, how he would rule on requests from the networks and Warner Bros. recording company to make use of the tapes played at the cover-up trial.

The judge asked attorneys in the case to provide written legal arguments disputing his fears about what would happen if a new trial were ordered for the cover-up defendants by an appeals court.

More than 30 of the tapes were played at the three-month trial, and transcripts were published in newspapers and other publications.

But Judge Sirica said that nevertheless several obstacles remained before Americans could hear the recordings of conversations involving President Nixon and his aides.

Floyd Abrams, the lawyer representing the three major TV networks, argued that a time must come when the defendants' trial rights are overshadowed by the broader value permitting Americans to hear the tapes for themselves.

"It seems to me as a matter of law that the trial is over," he said.

He said that even after a Supreme Court ruling, perhaps two years from now, the defendants might still be entitled to ask for a new trial under special circumstances.