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Watergate Committee Asks For Nixon Tapes

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Watergate committee voted Tuesday to ask President Nixon for tape recordings of presidential conversations bearing on the Watergate affair.

Presidential Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler indicated earlier in the day that the President regards the tapes in the same category as presidential papers he already has refused to give the committee.

But ranking committee members said they hoped that Nixon would arrange access to White House tape recordings and documents pertinent to the Watergate affair.

Nixon has invoked the doctrine of executive privilege to prevent release of presidential papers and it was announced Tuesday that he had invoked it again.

When the Watergate committee convened for its afternoon session, chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr., D-N.C., said the President had forbidden Secret Service officials to testify "concerning matters observed or learned while performing pro-

tective functions for the President or in their duties at the White House.

Hidden devices that record presidential conversations in his offices and on his telephones were installed and are maintained by the Secret Service.

The committee subpoenaed Alfred C. Wong, the Secret Service official responsible for the taping. Wong appeared Tuesday for a closed-door session with Ervin and Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr., R-Tenn., vice chairman.

He was accompanied by the general counsel for the Treasury Department who said the President had directed him to invoke executive privilege to bar Wong's testimony.

The counsel then read a letter, dated Monday, from the President to Treasury Secretary George P. Shultz, directing Shultz to refuse to permit Secret Service personnel to testify before congressional committees on White House matters. The protective agency is

part of the Treasury Department.

The existence of the tape recordings was disclosed Monday by Alexander P. Butterfield, a former White House aide, who told the committee they had been installed to compile an historic record of the Nixon administration. He said

other participants in conversations with the President were unaware they were being recorded.

Ervin said the committee decided to write to the President in the hope of settling the controversy amicably.

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The flurry of activity Tuesday moved the committee and the President closer to a constitutional confrontation over whether a congressional committee has the power to demand documents from the executive branch.

On July 6, the President wrote Ervin that he could not testify before the committee or provide it documents from White House files because such actions would violate the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers.

He called the doctrine "fundamental to our structure of government. In my view, as in the view of previous presidents, its preservation is vital."

Ervin has contended that the President has no power to withhold material pertaining to political or criminal activities.

Ervin and Nixon are scheduled to meet privately on the controversy after the President is discharged from Bethesda Naval Hospital where he is confined with pneumonia.

Doctors said he should be well enough to leave the hospital Friday.

On another front, it was learned Tuesday that special prosecutor Archibald Cox also plans to ask for the presidential tapes. Separation of powers would not bar Cox from obtaining presidential files since the prosecutor is part of the executive branch.