

Cox May Present Toughest Challenge For President

WASHINGTON (AP) — The toughest challenge President Nixon faces to a decision to withhold tapes of White House conversations may come not from the Senate Watergate committee but from special prosecutor Archibald Cox.

With the presidential announcement, that he will not release the tapes, Cox is likely to respond with a combination of legal and political pressure.

So far, attention in the dispute over access to the tapes has centered on the Watergate committee's efforts to convince the President to turn them over voluntarily.

Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr., D-N.C., has said he would vote to subpoena the tapes if the White House doesn't volunteer them.

In response to earlier requests for White House documents, President Nixon has said he believes giving them to a congressional committee would violate the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers.

That argument wouldn't apply to a request from Cox, whose office is part of the executive branch.

At a news conference a month ago, the prosecutor spec-

ulated at length on how he might proceed if the White House balked at turning over information he felt was needed for his investigation.

"If there comes a time when I am not getting the information that I think I have been assured is necessary then, of course, I will report to you (the press) and to the country," Cox said.

And he made it clear he wouldn't limit his actions to a public appeal for cooperation.

He acknowledged he had

asked his staff to research the legal ramifications of subpoenaing the President.

Then he was asked if that meant "it is possible that your organization will seek to call President Nixon?"

"I say that there is a possibility of that," replied Cox. "Whether it will be the best way to pursue the investigation and whether we would have any legal grounds are both open questions."

Cox said it would be premature to draw any conclusions from his speculations. But he also appeared determined to send the White House the message that should a conflict arise, he was prepared to act.