

U.S. Limits Trial of Chapin

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The Watergate special prosecutor's office said yesterday that it intends to conduct the trial of former White House aide Dwight Chapin as a "relatively straightforward perjury case" instead of an all-out Watergate scandal trial.

The comments came in a motion filed in U.S. District Court here in response to attempts by Chapin's attorneys to get access to a March 13, 1972, White House tape of a conversation between former White House counsel John W. Dean III and President Nixon.

Chapin's attorneys had asked for the tape so they could question Dean's credibility, saying they "reasonably believe" it will show Dean lied to the Senate Watergate committee.

"The alleged misstatement, however, relates in no way to any testimony or issue relevant to the trial of this case," assistant Watergate special prosecutor Richard J. Davis said in an affidavit.

He said the prosecutor's office intends to offer testimony

concerning four different contacts between Dean and Chapin. These are conversations concerning a trip to Washington by convicted campaign saboteur Donald Segretti, a conversation concerning a trip to Florida by Segretti in August, 1972, a conversation between Chapin and Dean concerning "Segretti's potential legal problems," and a memorandum that Dean received on Nov. 5, 1972.

The special prosecutor's office also defended Watergate special prosecutor Leon Jaworski's statements on a national television show in which he vouched for Dean's credibility.

Chapin's lawyers had asked that the charges against their client be dropped because of those out-of-court statements about prospective witnesses. Chapin is charged with four counts of lying to a federal grand jury last spring when asked about Segretti's activities.

In saying that public debates about Dean's credibility have been "unfortunate," the special prosecution force proposed that an order be signed by U.S. District Judge Gerhard Gesell limiting any further out-of-court statements about the case by lawyers on both sides and any prospective witnesses.