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Patman Lectures Empty Seats As Nixon Aides Fail to Appear

By Karlyn Barker
Washington Post Staff Writer

The chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee lectured to four empty witness chairs yesterday when four top aides to President Nixon failed to show up for hearings into the Watergate bugging incident and alleged irregularities in re-election campaign financing.

Efforts to subpoena their testimony also collapsed when the Committee failed twice to get a quorum to vote on the issue.

Rep. Wright Patman (D-Tex.), the Committee's chairman, blamed Mr. Nixon for the absence of the four, saying the President "has pulled down an iron curtain of secrecy to keep the American people from knowing the facts."

Patman, who arrived at the morning hearing at the Rayburn Building with a prepared speech, said he had been notified by attorneys for the Committee for the Re-Election of the President that they had advised John Mitchell, former campaign chairman and attorney general; Clark MacGregor, committee chairman and Maurice Stans, finance chairman, not to attend the hearing.

The Texas Democrat said the fourth man, John Dean, White House counsel to the President, sent word just before the meeting that his appearance would violate the principle of executive privilege protecting presidential assistants.

Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D-Wis.), who read letters from his constituents asking that

Congress press for an investigation of the Watergate issue, said the absence of the witness "will be the political turning point in the polls as long as Mr. Nixon shows contempt for the American people."

But Republicans, led by Rep. William B. Widnall (R-N.J.) their ranking committee man, boycotted the hearing. Widnall sent a letter to Patman accusing him of "high-handed" behavior and charging that the meeting was illegal because Committee members had not been notified of it seven days in advance.

Only 17 committee members attended the morning meeting, two short of a quorum. The one Republican in attendance, William Frenzel of Minnesota, criticized Patman for not keeping the Committee informed on his investigation efforts.

Patman then scheduled another meeting for 3 p.m. He waited 45 minutes before adjourning the session again with only 14 members present, including Republican Rep. Garry E. Brown, of Michigan.

The lack of a quorum prevented the Committee from voting to subpoena the witnesses or, as suggested by Rep. Bill Chappell of Florida, to subpoena bank and re-election committee records instead.

A spokesman for Patman said Committee staffers had tried to drum up better Democratic attendance at the meeting "but it's a bad time of year" with Congress so close to adjourning. Patman himself was vague with respect to fu-

ture steps he might take to pursue and publicize any further investigation.

In a related matter, MacGregor, who had refused to testify, said yesterday that "the grand jury had indicted those who are indictable" in the Watergate incident.

"Innuendo in the press has not indicted anyone," the President's re-election committee chairman said. "The Washington Post is elevating gossip to front page news . . . because it is frustrated that the McGovern policy is shared by only 10 or 15 per cent of the people."

MacGregor added, however, that "of course, more Democrats than that will support McGovern."

In another development yesterday, the General Accounting Office announced that campaign media expenditures for both President Nixon and Sen. McGovern are being investigated.

The announcement was made by Philip S. Hughes, director of the office of federal elections in the GAO, after Lawrence F. O'Brien, the McGovern campaign chairman, asked for a GAO inquiry into the November Group, the Nixon advertising and media agency.

In a letter to Hughes yesterday, O'Brien said the financial disclosure reports of the Nixon committee listed a \$595,000 payment to the November Group without any further accounting of the actual use of the funds.