

Nixon to Dean: Cut probe off at the pass

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WASHINGTON (AP) — During a discussion on March 17, 1973, of the Watergate investigation, then President Richard M. Nixon told his White House counsel, John W. Dean III, "what you've got to do ... is cut her off at the pass."

Nixon explained he meant limiting the investigation to the original Watergate burglars.

A tape recording of that conversation was played Friday at the Watergate cover-up trial. It was the first time the text of that conversation was made public.

The next tape scheduled for playing at the trial is the March 21, 1973,

conversation in which Nixon, Dean and H.R. Haldeman discussed Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt's demands for money.

During his fight to save his presidency, Nixon maintained that he didn't learn of the involvement of White House and campaign aides in the Watergate break-in until Dean told him on March 21.

However, during the March 17 conversation Nixon is heard saying to Dean:

"It's your view the vulnerables are basically, Mitchell, Colson, Haldeman, indirectly, possibly directly"

He was referring to former Atty. Gen.

John N. Mitchell, former White House counsel Charles W. Colson, and Haldeman, Nixon's top aide.

Mitchell and Haldeman are among the five defendants charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice in the cover-up case. A similar charge against Colson was dropped after he pleaded guilty in a related matter.

The other three defendants are John D. Ehrlichman, another former White House aide, former Asst. Atty. Gen. Robert C. Mardian and Kenneth W. Parkinson, a former attorney for the Nixon re-election committee.