

Defense attorneys begin Dean's cross-examination

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Confronted with the realization that the Watergate scandal was about to break open, Richard M. Nixon sought assurances from John Dean that he would not be hurt by what Dean was telling prosecutors.

Dean, former White House counsel, as on the witness stand in the Watergate cover-up trial for the fifth day as prosecutors played the tape of a meeting Dean had with Nixon on April 16, 1973, 10 months after the June 17, 1972, Watergate breakin.

Defense attorneys, who began their cross-examination later in the day, had pressed for playing of the tape. In it Dean tells Nixon: "I think you're still

five steps ahead of what will ever emerge publicly."

Earlier Dean had testified that he met reluctantly on March 28 with John N. Mitchell and Jeb Stuart Magruder, once the top two officials of Nixon's re-election committee. He said he asked Mitchell what had happened between the Feb. 4, 1972, meeting when Mitchell rejected a political espionage plan and June when re-election committee burglars broke into Democratic Party headquarters.

"All I've ever been able to do is to put the pieces together from tidbits that the plan was approved (later) but in a way that it wouldn't be traced to the committee," Dean recalled, telling Mitchell.

"Mr. Mitchell said to me, 'Well, John, that' pretty close but we thought it would be two to three times removed,'" Dean said.

"Two to three removed from what?" asked the prosecutor James F. Neal.

"From the committee," Dean said.

Mitchell, one of the five defendants in the trial flushed red at that point. The other defendants are H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman, Kenneth W. Parkinson and Robert C. Mardian. All five are charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice.

Dean said that near the end of March he hired a criminal lawyer and first met

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with prosecutors on April 8.

He said he told Haldeman what he had done and received the reply, "John, you ought to think about that because once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it's awfully hard to get it back in."

Dean said that on April 15, 1973, he told Nixon, "I didn't think my having gone to the prosecutors was an act of disloyalty, that the best way for me to handle it was to tell what I know."

The White House said no tape recording of that conversation was made because the recording machine filled up in early afternoon. Nixon that day was told of the full involvement of his aides in the scandal by Atty. Gen. Richard G. Kleindienst and assistant Atty. Gen. Henry E. Petersen.

Dean met with Nixon again the following day and the President asked him to sign two versions of a resignation letter to be used if Dean was charged with a crime. Dean refused saying he wanted to write his own letter and that Haldeman and Ehrlichman should also submit theirs.

The jury heard Nixon telling Dean:

"You're to say (to the prosecutors) 'I told the President about this. I told the President first there was no involvement in the White House ... and the President said 'Look, I want to get to the bottom of this thing, period. See what I'm driving at — not just the White House. You continued your investigation, and so forth. The President went ahead, investigated in his own way, which I have done.'"

In response Dean said, "I think you're in front now ... And you can rest assured everything I do will keep you as far as -"

But Nixon said, "No, I don't want that. Understand? When I say, 'Don't lie' about me either."

Dean: "No, I won't, sir ..."

President: "'Cause I think I've done the right thing, but I want, I want you to do it ... If you feel I've done the right thing ... I think the country is entitled to know it. Because we're talking about the presidency here."