

Senate Watergate Investigation Is Set Up by Party-line Vote

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rejecting Republican attempts to expand its focus, the Senate has voted to form a special committee to investigate the Watergate bugging incident and other allegations of GOP political espionage against Democrats in 1972.

The vote Wednesday was 77 to 0 after Republican senators failed to gain equal membership on the panel and to broaden its inquiry to include charges of Democratic misdeeds in the 1964 and 1968 campaigns.

Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr., D-N.C., who has been designated chairman, said the committee probably won't be ready to begin public hearings for a couple of months.

Members of the panel will be named by Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield and Republican Leader Hugh Scott.

White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler has pledged administration cooperation with any nonpartisan investigation. The White House was reported to favor an evenly divided committee.

Two former officials of President Nixon's re-election campaign were convicted by a U.S. District Court Jan. 30 of conspiracy, burglary and wire-tapping in connection with the break-in and bugging of quarters in the Watergate complex in Washington. Five other persons, including a former Nixon security man, pleaded guilty to similar charges early in the trial.

Democrats initiated the congressional probe, saying the trial failed to investigate the bugging, partly because the Nixon administration's Justice Department was reluctant to fully probe allegations that high-ranking White House officials approved the operation.

Debate on the resolution Wednesday often was acrimonious with Republicans accusing the Democrats of trying to stack the committee so they could conduct a partisan probe aimed solely at discrediting the GOP.

At one point in the debate, Scott threatened "to leave the whole thing to the majority" and let the American people see that the probe is "a parti-

san political effort to extract the last bit of juice from an already squeezed lemon—and lemon it is."

But Mansfield said today that any suggestions that the probe will be unfair or partisan is, in effect, a slur on Ervin since the panel will have three Republicans and four Democrats, including Ervin.

"Any suggestion that the committee will be partisan or unfair must derive from the notion that Sen. Ervin will be partisan or irresponsible," Mansfield told reporters, adding he picked the North Carolina senator to avoid any suggestion of unfairness.

He said he hopes to meet with Ervin later in the day to pick the other three Democrats for the panel. Scott said he also hopes to make an announcement on members later in the day.

Earlier, Republicans lost two attempts by Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., to split the committee evenly with three Democrats and three Republicans, and another by Sen. Edward Gurney, R-Fla., to extend the probe to include the 1964 and 1968 presidential campaigns. It finally was decided to boost the committee's membership from the original five to seven, but with Democrats still in the majority.

The votes were 45 to 35 and 44 to 36 against the two Baker amendments, and 44 to 32 against Gurney's. Voting went along almost-straight party lines.