

A Gag on Voice Of America

Washington

The Voice of America news staff has been instructed by government officials not to broadcast Watergate disclosures that are attributed to unidentified sources.

The order has touched off what one high VOA official termed a "vehement difference of opinion" between the government - operated radio network and its parent agency, the U.S. Information Agency.

It has also resulted in distress in the newsrooms of VOA, where the partial gag on Watergate is viewed as an obstacle to covering a major story that free-nation newspapers all over the world are reporting fully.

STORY

The instructions prompted VOA editors to kill a story on Sunday that it had already sent to its outlets.

The story, published in the Washington Post and the New York Times, quoted "reliable sources" as saying that former presidential counsel John W. Dean has told federal investigators that he discussed the Watergate coverup with President Nixon on at least 35 occa-

sions between January and April of this year.

James Keogh, director of the USIA, said he had issued the VOA attribution policy and that it will remain in effect.

"My guidance has been to cover the Watergate story factually, but do not use rumor, speculation, hearsay or anonymous accusation," he said.

He believes the Dean story fell within the latter category, he said.

VIEW

Keogh said VOA had been instructed to explain that the Watergate affair is "interplay between a free press, the executive branch and the legislative and judicial branches of government."

Although Keogh's comments seemed to preclude a reversal of his policy, the deputy director of VOA, William D. Miller, said, "We are still discussing this, and there are differences that are unresolved."

Miller said there is still a basic question of interpretation involved in weighing each new Watergate disclosure.

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