

# Mansfield Terms Nixon Impeachment 'Debatable'

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WASHINGTON, July 10 — Mike Mansfield, the Senate majority leader, said today it was "debatable" whether President Nixon could be impeached for not knowing of the role of his staff in the Watergate affair, even if he had no personal knowledge of the break-in.

However, in response to a reporter's question whether the President's ignorance was "in itself an incident of his competence," Senator Mansfield said, "Yes, he should be known."

The Montana Democrat said at a breakfast meeting with reporters that he personally believed the President's public statement denying personal involvement in the Watergate affair.

"I think we ought to take him at his word, if we take the law to be innocent until proven guilty," he said. "That applies to a President as well as to a pipe fitter."

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But the Senator added that Mr. Nixon's power may be weakened by his policies as well as by the accusations made against him in the Watergate hearings. "If he's been crippled," Mr. Mansfield said of the President, "it's because of his own policies, and to some extent because of the appearance of the facts [in the Watergate hearings] rather than by the facts to date."

The Senator also said he thought that "at the present time" Mr. Nixon would serve out his full term in office.

Mr. Mansfield stressed that the impeachment of a President was a last resort and a matter to be decided by the House of Representatives, rather than by public opinion.

"Each member of the House must decide for himself what is hearsay and what is evidence," he said.

"If you have impeachment you bring the whole Government to a halt," the Senator continued. "The whole Senate would be over in the House. We have to differentiate between the man and the office—the institution is what counts."

## Informal Meeting Urged

Senator Mansfield suggested that the President meet informally with the Senate Watergate committee after the initial phase of the hearings was completed.

He said he agreed with Mr. Nixon that it would be improper for him to appear while witnesses were still appearing before the committee. "We should wait until all the evidence is in, until all the facts are laid out," Mr. Mansfield said.

He also said the committee "does not have irrefutable evidence" that the President was involved in the Watergate affair.



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Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, left, and John N. Mitchell speaking as they passed each other yesterday on Capitol Hill.

In response to reporters' questions, however, the Senate majority leader said he agreed that the concept of executive privilege might have to be altered in a case involving suspected wrongdoing, thus necessitating some contact between the President and the Senate committee.

Senator Mansfield said he thought Mr. Nixon should supply papers dealing with the Watergate matter to the committee, and that the controversy surrounding the financing of the President's homes in San Clemente, Calif., and Key Biscayne, Fla., "does raise questions" that need to be dealt with.

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