

Why They Ask What

Washington

"I listen to the others and try to establish a principal line that I'm interested in. And then I try to bore in on it."

That is the way Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. describes the way he prepares to question the Watergate witnesses.

More often than not, the line the Tennessee Republican chooses involves an effort to discover the motives of the witnesses. And, with no pre-drafted questions — just a few scribbled notes — in front of him, he tries to get inside the minds of those involved in the Watergate conspiracy.

Other Senators have different routines. Herman E. Talmadge, (Dem-Ga.) gets up every morning before 4 a.m. and begins developing his questions. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (Rep.-Conn.) prepares his questions at daily sessions with his staff, some lasting well into the night and others beginning at 7 a.m. Daniel K. Inouye (Dem.-Hawaii) comes in each morning with a neatly typed list of questions he wants answered and patiently crosses them off, one by one, if they are asked before he gets his turn.

SEVEN

There is seldom coordination among the seven senators over who will ask which questions. And only rarely does the committee staff suggest a question for a sen-



SENATOR MONTOYA
He needed more help



SENATOR INOUE
He brought a list

ator to ask.

Rather, after several hours together under the glaring television lights, the senators return separately to their offices and begin the preparation routines they have developed since the hearings began two months ago.

INDIRECT

Baker, who may be the most adroit interrogator, says he enjoys having other committee members take their turn before him. That way, he says, the substantive questions have already been asked, and he has what he calls "maximum freedom to ask what I want."

Often, as he did with John N. Mitchell yesterday, the Tennessee senator begins in-

directly. "Would you tell me, Mr. Mitchell, what is your perception of the institution of the presidency?" he asked.

As Baker had expected, Mitchell sidestepped such a broad question. But, with that as an opening, Baker gradually got around to the heart of his inquiry.

"Is the presidency so shrouded in mystique," Baker asked, "is there such an aura of magnificence about the presidency, is there such an awesome responsibility for a multitude of problem-sand undertakings of this nation that the presidency in some instances must be spared the detail, must be spared the difficulty of situations which in more ordi-

nary circumstances might be considered by some at least to be frank, open declarations of criminal offense?"

It was a rhetorical question, but it enabled Baker to express his distress at the thought that aides like Mitchell were making decisions that Baker feels should have been made by Richard M. Nixon.

ADMISSION

And, with that and similar questions, the senator was able to wring from Mitchell the admission that he had wored to protect, not inform, the President, and that it was "improper" for him to have done so.

Just as Baker tries to establish the motives of the witnesses, so other senators have their preferred lines of questioning.

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem.-N.C.), the chairman, tries to bring out the constitutional implications of the Watergate affair. Weicker, is most interested in the Nixon Administration's internal security operations. Senator Edward J. Gurney (Rep.-Fla.) concentrates on what each witness told and was told by Mr. Nixon.

Talmadge seems fascinated by the financial manipulations in the Watergate case.

PROBLEMS

Senator Joseph M. Montoya (Dem.-N.M.) acknowledges that he has had problems in his questioning. He enters the hearing room each day with a prepared set of questions and appears to ask each one of them, regardless of whether they have been asked by another senator and regardless of the witness' answers.

Montoya has told associates that much of his problem has been caused by his lack of staff assistance.

At one of the early committee meetings, Inouye recommended that each senator be assigned a committee staff member to work directly with him. Ervin rejected the suggestion, argu-

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ing that the staff would be available to all the senators on the committee.

In fact, that has not happened. The senators, other than Ervin and Baker, the ranking Republican complain privately that they have enormous difficulty obtaining information from the committee staff, that the staff seldom volunteers material and that they have been required to drain the last drop out of their own staffs to fill the void.

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