

Conflicts on Watergate

President in Press Conference Adds Little

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President Nixon's news conference yesterday, devoted almost entirely to Watergate-related matters, resolved few of the conflicts already produced by testimony before the Senate committee investigating the scandal.

The differences between the President's version of events and those given to the committee by some of his former subordinates were for the most part slight ones, and added little new detail to what has already become public knowledge.

Many of the questions addressed to Mr. Nixon concerned motivations or broad themes rather than specific details of conversations or events, and the answers were in the same general vein.

Generally, his account was similar to testimony given the committee by John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, his two top aides until last April 30, and in contradiction to the testimony of his former counsel, John W. Dean III.

In discussing a meeting March 22 with Haldeman, Dean, Ehrlichman and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, for example, Mr. Nixon said he emphasized throughout that "we must get this story (of the Watergate burglary and subsequent cover-up) out—get the truth out, whatever and whoever it's going to hurt."

Dean, in his testimony, said the meeting was "a general discussion" and "a further indication there would be no effort to stop the cover-up from continuing."

Mitchell told the committee that Watergate was not discussed in detail at the March 22 meeting, but Haldeman said those present—including the President—agreed that there should be "a complete report put out by the White House" giving all the information then available about the burglary and subsequent events.

Asked yesterday whom he had pressed to investigate the Watergate affair, the President said that shortly after the June 17, 1972, break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee, he

spoke "first of all" to Clark MacGregor.

MacGregor, a former Republican congressman from Minnesota and White House assistant, had just been named to replace Mitchell as head of the President's re-election committee.

MacGregor "told me that he would conduct a thorough investigation," the President said, to see that no one on the committee staff had been involved.

MacGregor, in a sworn deposition last month, did not mention the President's request. He did say, however, that he interviewed several top officials at the re-election committee—including Mitchell—and received assurances that no one then employed there had been involved in the break-in.

Jeb Stuart Magruder, the deputy to both Mitchell and MacGregor at the committee, pleaded guilty last Friday to helping plan the Watergate bugging of the Democratic headquarters and then conspiring to cover up the ensuing scandal.

President Nixon said yesterday that "apparently (MacGregor's) investigation was very effective except for Mr. Magruder, who stayed on" at the committee until after the 1972 election.

"Mr. MacGregor does not have to assume responsibility for (Magruder)," the President said. "Basically what happened there was that he believed Mr. Magruder, and many others have believed him, too. He proved, however, to be wrong."

The President was also asked yesterday about his overtures to federal Judge Matt Byrne to become director of the FBI—a subject that was raised while Byrne was conducting the California trial of Daniel Ellsberg for leaking the Pentagon Papers to the press.

The President said he spent only "perhaps one minute" with Byrne when the judge came to the western White House to discuss the FBI position with Ehrlichman. The Ellsberg case was not discussed, the President said.

Mr. Nixon responded that he saw nothing improper in the meeting—which when it became public knowledge shortly afterward was used by Ellsberg's lawyers as an argument for dropping the charges.

Ehrlichman testified that he contacted Byrne at the President's instructions, and that the judge told him, "I see no reason why we could not talk right away" even though the Ellsberg trial was in progress.

Ehrlichman said he saw no impropriety in contacting Byrne because he had already spoken to Richard Kleindienst, then the Attorney General, about the judge. Kleindienst told the Senate committee he had endorsed Byrne for the FBI job but had not thought he should be approached during the trial.

Mr. Nixon said he wanted to offer Byrne the FBI directorship because the nomination of L. Patrick Gray III was running into trouble in Congress and that the judge, a Democrat and a former U.S. attorney, appeared to meet all the qualifications for the post.

At the San Clemente news conference yesterday, the President also took issue with Dean on the question of whether money was offered to the Watergate defendants in an effort to buy their silence.

Dean testified that in a meeting with the President on March 13 of this year he told Mr. Nixon that the seven defendants were making "money demands" that he said could reach \$1 million. He also said the subject of executive clemency was mentioned briefly.

Haldeman told the Senate committee that this conversation between Dean and the President occurred on March 21, and that he has listened to a tape recording of the meeting.

The President yesterday described the conversation as having taken place on March 21.

"Basically," Mr. Nixon said, "what Mr. Dean was concerned about on March 21 was not so much the raising of the money for the defendants, but the raising of money for the defendants for the purpose of keeping them still—in other words, so-called 'hush money'."

He said he told Dean that "while we could raise the money," the proposal could never work without executive clemency as well, and clemency would not be granted.

Dean did mention the million dollar figure, Mr. Nixon said.

New Detail

Remain

The President also mentioned a telephone conversation he had with Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen on April 18 of this year in which Petersen told him that E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy—two of the Watergate defendants—had broken into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist in September, 1971.

Petersen told the Senate committee that the President told him "that's a national security matter—you stay out of it." Later, he said, Mr. Nixon changed his mind at the urging of Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and allowed the

Justice Department to pass the information on to Byrne at Ellsberg's trial.

Though there was no evidence that the break-in produced any information, the fact that it occurred was a factor in Byrne's decision to dismiss the charges against Ellsberg.

Mr. Nixon said yesterday that Petersen asked him if the break-in had produced any evidence and the replied that it had not—that "it was a dry hole."

Petersen replied that was "good," the President said, meaning that as "no evidence was developed as a result of the break-in, which is incidentally an illegal, unauthorized (act) as far as I was concerned, and completely deplorable . . . there was no requirement" that the jury in the Ellsberg trial be told about it.

Ten days later, the President said, Kleindienst persuaded him that the administration should "bend over backwards" in the Ellsberg case and tell Judge Byrne about the break-in.

The President was asked yesterday about a telephone conversation he had with Gray on July 6, 1972, during which Gray has testified he told Mr. Nixon members of his staff were trying "to mortally wound you" by impeding a thorough investigation of the Watergate break-in.

He didn't remember if those words were used or not, the President said, but Gray told him "some of my top aides were not cooperating" with the investigation.

The President said he ordered Gray to go ahead with a thorough investigation once he had established that to do so would not jeopardize Central Intelligence Agency operations. Gray said he had already done so.

(CIA officials told the Senate committee that Haldeman suggested strongly to them that they tell Gray not to extend the FBI's Watergate investigation into Mexico, where illegal campaign contributions had been "laundered" by passing them through a Mexican bank. Haldeman said he simply wanted to be sure no intelligence operations would be uncovered by the FBI.)

At yesterday's news conference, the President referred briefly to his secret tape recordings of conversations in his office—a practice the White House says has been discontinued since it became public at the hearings.

Mr. Nixon said he let Haldeman listen to only one tape, that of a meeting with Dean last Sept. 15. Haldeman, on the other hand, has testified that the President let him listen as well to tapes of the March 21 meeting with Dean.

The President said he asked Haldeman to listen to the Sept. 15 tapes "in order to make sure that as far as any allegations that had been made by Mr. Dean with regard to that conversation (were concerned), I wanted to be sure that we were absolutely correct in our response."