



SEN. HOWARD BAKER
... bids Nixon speak up

Watergate Explainable, Baker Says

By Tim O'Brien
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Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) vice chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee, yesterday called on President Nixon to disclose a "matter of grave, national importance" that he said would explain some of the covert Watergate activities.

While Baker would not reveal the information he wants disclosed, he said it related to national security and, if released, "would justify or at least explain some of the conduct that appears otherwise unexplainable."

He said that, if the information is disclosed, "the odds are probably better that it would be helpful to the President than hurtful."

Baker said he does not intend to reveal the substance of the information, but added, "I believe the information I possess and the President possesses has sufficient bearing on the conduct of affairs in the White House that it ought to be disclosed."

Baker said the President's so-called Operation Candor has failed to remove public doubt about his role in Watergate, but he added that, "as of this moment, the odds would favor the President continuing his term."

He said he was "personally disappointed that the White House has apparently changed its tune" about making summaries of key Watergate-related tapes available to the public.

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There may still be summaries or white papers, as they say, but I think altogether that detracts from the effectiveness and the believability of Operation Candor," Baker said on the TV program "Issues and Answers" (ABC-WNIAL).

Asked if he were aware of any more Watergate bombshells, Baker cited the "matter of grave national importance" and declared "There are animals crashing around in the forest. I can hear them, but I can't see them."

"I do know of other circumstances that I think ought to be investigated and they ought to be disclosed to the country. Some of them do involve national security, but there must be a balance at some point ... on whether the requirements of national security are greater than the requirements of domestic tranquility," he said.

The Senate Watergate committee should reconsider its subpoena of more than 500 Watergate-related White House documents and tapes, Baker said.

He said the subpoenas, signed by committee chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr., were issued in a manner "out of the ordinary," because he, as vice chairman, had not been consulted in advance by Ervin.

The White House described the subpoenas as "incredible," but has not formally indicated whether they will be honored. Three separate subpoenas were issued by the committee after Dec. 18, asking for tapes and documents relating to the so-called milk deal, a contribution from billionaire Howard Hughes and the group of events called Watergate.

Baker called the number of subpoenas issued and the number of tapes and docu-

ments requested "extraordinary."

"I do not blame Sam Ervin," Baker said. "He is a remarkable man. But I do think that we ought to give further consideration to that (subpoena) question when we return and have our first executive session."

Baker said the "matter of grave national security" is the same matter brought up by the President in his Nov. 17 question-and-answer session with the Associated Press Managing Editors Association in Florida.

At that session, Mr. Nixon said "national security matters were not matters that should be investigated, because there were some very highly sensitive matters involved, not only in Ellsberg but also another matter so sensitive that even Sen. Ervin and Sen. Baker have decided that they should not delve further into it."

There has been published speculation that the matter involved a highly placed Soviet agent operating as an American counterspy, who might have been compromised by continued investigation by the Senate committee and the special prosecutor's office.

A New York Times article earlier this month said the agent has informed the FBI that a set of the Pentagon Papers had been given to the Soviet Embassy and that further investigation by the Watergate committee might reveal the name of that agent.

Whatever the substance of the "matter of grave national concern," Baker said he now wants the President to disclose it.

On the issue of disclosure, Baker said "the country isn't concerned for narrow legalisms; they want the facts."