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Senate Watergate report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate Watergate committee, which first riveted national attention to the scandals that have led to preliminary impeachment proceedings against President Nixon, yesterday proposed the most sweeping overhaul of campaign laws in American history.

The final report of the seven-man panel, published in three volumes of 2,217 pages, was shorn of conclusions of individual guilt or innocence.

But in its unanimous report the committee said the nation needs an election commission to supervise federal campaigns and a permanent public prosecutor to enforce political laws free from the interference of the executive branch.

It said the public financing of campaigns is not needed to assure the ending of financial abuses.

The Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign activities presented in minute detail the most complete report to date on the burglary, cover-up and assorted acts of "corruption, fraud and abuse of official power" that now carry the collective name of Watergate.

The evidence in the report comprises much of the data now being considered by the House Judiciary Committee which is soon to vote on whether to report a bill of impeachment to the full House of Representatives.

The Senate committee decided to avoid any conclusions that might affect the impeachment proceedings or the outcome of the various Watergate trials.

"The Select Committee is acutely conscious that, at the time it presents this report, the issue of impeachment of the President on Watergate-related evidence is pending in the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives," the panel said.

"It must be stressed that this committee's hearings were not conducted, and this report not prepared, to determine the legal guilt or innocence of any person or whether the President should be impeached," it said.

The final report eliminated all conclusions that had been contained in draft reports which earlier were leaked to the press.

Instead it concentrates on the minute recitation of Watergate evidence and the recommendations for new laws it says are needed to help prevent future Watergates.

"The Watergate affair reflects an alarming indifference displayed by some in high public of-

fice or position to concepts of morality and public responsibility and trust," the report said.

"Indeed," it said, "the conduct of many Watergate participants seems grounded on the belief that the ends justified the means, that the laws could be flaunted to maintain the present administration in office."

"Surely one of the most penetrating lessons of Watergate is that campaign practices must be effectively supervised and enforcement of the criminal laws vigorously pursued against all offenders—even those of high estate—if your free institutions are to survive," the report added.

If the report declined to take sides, some of the committee members did not.

Chairman Sam J. Ervin, D-N.C., while saying he is not attempting to judge whether President Nixon is impeachable, wrote a vivid indictment of the conduct of the White House during the Watergate period and made clear he believes the President must take responsibility.

Citing the evidence of the report, Ervin said the President's men had as their objective the destruction of the integrity of the process by which the President is elected in the 1972 campaign.

Their second objective, he said, was to cover up their own wrongdoing.

Although the final report deleted a conclusion that campaign funds had been used to buy the silence of the original Watergate defendants, Ervin said exactly that happened.

"They made cash payments totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars out of campaign funds in surreptitious ways to the original seven Watergate defendants as 'hush money' to buy their silence and keep them from revealing their knowledge of the identities and activities of the officers and employees of the Nixon re-election committees and the White House aides who had participated in Watergate," Ervin said.

For the same reason, he said, assurances were given to the seven defendants that they would receive executive clemency after serving only short prison terms.

Ervin said the White House aides who gave those assurances and took part in Watergate events were motivated by a "lust for political power."

Sen. Edward J. Gurney, R-Fla., who was President Nixon's chief defender at the hearings,

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said that while there was a scheme in high places in the administration to burglarize Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex, no proof has been uncovered that Nixon knew of it or of the cover-up that followed. Gurney has been indicted in Florida on charges of taking illegal campaign contributions.

Vice Chairman Howard H. Baker Jr., Tenn., said that evidence before the committee "does not answer the question of what the President or other individuals knew or when they knew it, nor does it explain why the Democratic National Committee headquarters was twice the target of an illegal entry."

Two committee members, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii, and Joseph M. Montoya, D-N.M., voted against the committee's 5-2 decision not to endorse the public financing of future presidential campaigns although they endorsed the report as a whole.

They said public financing is favored both by Congress and the public.

Baker and Gurney, in their individual views, insisted public financing is not needed. Baker said a realistic tax incentive to encourage individual political contributions would provide the same funds.

As adopted, the committee report would retain private financing of political campaigns but would severely limit — to a total \$3,000 — the amount any one individual could give.



The Senate Watergate Committee during 1973 hearings, left to right: Sen. Lowell Weicker, Jr., R-Conn.; Sen. Edward Gurney, R-Fla.; minority counsel Fred Thompson; Sen. Howard Baker, Jr., R-Tenn.; Sen. Sam Erwin, D-N.C.; chief counsel Sam Dash; assistant counsel Terry Lenzner; Sen. Herman Talmadge, D-Ga.; Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii; Sen. Joseph Montoya, D-N.M.