

WXPPost MAY 21 1975
Silbert Challenges Foes 'Hindsight'

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U.S. Attorney Earl J. Silbert, facing a renewed challenge to Senate confirmation of his appointment as federal prosecutor for the District of Columbia, said yesterday it was "hindsight with a vengeance" to say now that he was lax in pursuing leads in Watergate-related probes.

Reacting sometimes angrily to questions from Sen. John V. Tunney (D-Clair.), Silbert also denied he was inhibited in his probe by arguments that it might threaten national security.

But he failed to persuade Tunney, who said Silbert's involvement in an "investigation where so much water ran through the sieve" disqualifies him for the post he now holds.

Silbert, who was chief prosecutor in initial phases of the Watergate investigation, has

been serving under court appointment while his nomination and later by President Ford has languished in Congress for nearly 18 months.

Reportedly under administration pressure, the Senate Judiciary Committee decided recently to move ahead with confirmation action and a resumption of hearings was demanded by Tunney, the only senator present for most of yesterday's 3½-hour session.

Afterward Tunney said he believed a majority of the committee is inclined to recommend confirmation, with a vote probably to be taken next month. He said he would continue to oppose Silbert's confirmation but would not seek to delay it further.

Silbert's nomination has been endorsed by two former special Watergate prosecutors, Archibald Cox and Leon Jaworski, and by U.S. District

Court judges in Washington. Tunney questioned Silbert on why his office did not act sooner on leads, including information in possession of his office for 10 months, linking Watergate burglars G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt

with the break-in of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in the Pentagon papers case.

The information included a report of a telephone call between Ellsberg and his psychiatrist that was recovered from Hunt's White House safe.

World Trade Center Fires Investigated

Reuter

NEW YORK, May 20—Five marshals today were investigating the origin of seven suspicious fires that hit the twin towers of the World Trade Center Monday night.

The fires in the 110-story towers, kept firemen busy for more than two hours last night. Twenty firemen and eight cleaning women were sent to hospital with smoke inhalation, but none was seriously hurt.

Disclosure of the information, after former White House counsel John W. Dean linked Liddy and Hunt to the Ellsberg break-in, subsequently led to a mistrial in the Ellsberg case.

Silbert said he had not personally gone through all the files and, from what he had seen, there was nothing to indicate criminal activity by Liddy and Hunt in regard to the Ellsberg break-in.

It is "preposterous nonsense" to suggest that such a connection appeared likely at the time, Silbert said. "It just happened to be the fact," retorted Tunney.



EARL J. SILBERT
 ... criticism 'nonsense'