

Mathias Supports Kennedy

GOP Senator Backs Sabotage Probe

By Peter Osnos

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Sen. Charles McC Mathias (R-Md.) warmly endorsed yesterday the investigation into alleged Republican political espionage currently being conducted by the staff of a subcommittee chaired by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). Mathias is the only Republican on Kennedy's Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure to stand behind the investigation. In the process, he became one of the few prominent GOP politicians to speak out on the Watergate issue.

"I think this presents a serious moral question," the senator said in an interview yesterday, "bugging, wiretapping, breaking and entering are aggravated crimes when used to pervert a national election.

"I think it is important that we send a message from Washington to everyone interested in clean politics around the country that these things are wrong."

Mathias wrote Kennedy over the weekend supporting the Massachusetts senator's proposal for an investigation into "the allegations of widespread illegal or improper campaign activities.

"Until the truth is conclusively established," he wrote, "ugly suspicions will continue to haunt our political institutions."

Kennedy has enlisted the

backing of the subcommittee's Democratic majority to subpoena witnesses should he go ahead with public hearings on the GOP campaign activities.

At this point, the hearings almost certain not to begin until after the Nov. 7 presidential election, would be the only public forum for full disclosure of the alleged espionage operation conducted by President Nixon's campaign aides.

While few Republicans have addressed themselves to the substance of the continuing allegations, former Treasury Secretary John Connally, chairman of the Democrats for Nixon, offered his view yesterday.

He said that the alleged bugging of the Democratic National Committee headquarters was "very stupid and reprehensible." However, he said there is no evidence to implicate President Nixon.

Asked whether the administration of President Lyndon Johnson engaged in similar political wrongdoing, Connally paused a moment and said:

"I wasn't there. I was in Texas most of the time." Then he added: "I wouldn't want to give any administration in my life time the seal of political purity."

In New York City yesterday, Sargent Shriver, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, issued a statement recalling that his brother-in-law, the late President John F. Kennedy, was faced with a policy-

debacle in 1961 after the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion.

"President Kennedy," the candidate said, "went before the American people and took full responsibility for the failure of that mission." The implication was that President Nixon should do the same now.

"If he knew this was going on," Shriver said, "the President is guilty of immoral and illegal acts. If he did not, President Nixon had proved himself impotent and incompetent."

The remarks yesterday by Sen. Mathias fell far short of the ringing condemnations offered by a host of Democrats.

Capitol Hill sources said, however, that a growing number of GOP legislators are becoming "uneasy" over the Watergate issue.

Their concern, these sources said, stems partly from its potential political impact, as yet unrealized, and partly from the sinister cast of allegedly White House sanctioned activities.

Besides Mathias, the other Republicans on Kennedy's subcommittee are Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.) and Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.). They strongly objected to Kennedy's investigation plans in a joint letter to the senator.