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Mansfield Asks Probe Of Watergate

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Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) has asked Sen. Sam J. Ervin (D-N.C.) to make a full investigation of the Watergate bugging of Democratic national headquarters and "other insidious campaign practices."

"The question is not political, it is constitutional," said Mansfield in a letter to Ervin. "At stake is the continued vitality of the electoral process in the governmental structure of the nation."



SEN. MIKE MANSFIELD requests investigation

Ervin is chairman of the Senate Government Operations Committee and of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights. Mansfield yesterday released letters he had sent on Nov. 17, 10 days after the election, to Ervin and Judiciary Committee Chairman James O. Eastland (D-Miss.) saying that either unit would be an appropriate vehicle for the investigation and that they should decide which would do it.

Mansfield was not specific yesterday on which committee should make the investigation. In either case, Ervin would be in charge, but he has been resisting on grounds that he is too busy. He could not be reached yesterday.

Mansfield's action, according to some Democrats who have pressed for an investigation, makes it virtually certain that there will be a full, public inquiry into the Watergate bugging and a related campaign of alleged political spying and sabotage.

"There is no way this thing is going to be stopped now," said one source on Capitol Hill. "The only question is who will conduct the hearings."

According to those who have pressed for an investigation, the Mansfield letters insure that Eastland would be unlikely to try to convince fellow Democrats on his Judiciary Committee to stop public hearings by one of the judiciary subcommittees.

Mansfield offered "whatever you may agree is necessary in the way of funds, staff and subpoena powers to pursue a complete and impartial investigation which will lay bare all the facts on the Watergate affair and other insidious campaign practices. With the election behind us, it seems to me we can proceed to an inquiry into these matters in a dispassionate fashion."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) had taken some preliminary steps to conduct such an investigation by his Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Practices and Procedures. But he is known to

See WATERGATE, A19, Col. 2

WATERGATE, From A1 would help defuse charges that it was a vendetta against Republicans.

prefer that someone less political make the investigation, which would involve charges that the Watergate bugging, spurious letters concerning Democratic presidential candidates during last spring's primaries and other incidents of political sabotage were linked to the Republican high command, including some White House aides.

Mansfield's letters to the two chairmen should also halt speculation that he is not eager to make a full investigation.

Ervin, 76, is a former state supreme court judge and relatively nonpartisan. The right to privacy is one of his strongest convictions. He denounced the delay of the trial of the Watergate suspects until after the election (their trial begins here Monday) and urged President Nixon to make a nationwide address on the subject before the election.

"Watergate was not politics as usual," he wrote. "It was, to say the least, politics at its most unusual. It was not politics, American-style. The Watergate incident contains implications of great gravity for all political activity in this nation. What may be involved is not only a question of federal crimes which are properly subject to judicial disposition but also a cynical and dangerous intrusion into the integrity of the electoral processes. . . . That other questionable electoral practices may have been pursued in this or past elections . . . does not diminish by one iota the need for Senate inquiry into the Watergate Affair."

Mansfield noted yesterday in releasing the letters that Ervin has "great judicial and constitutional standing." His conduct of the investigation