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Senate Look At Watergate Is Assured

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The Senate Democratic Policy Committee agreed unanimously yesterday that there should be a Senate probe of the Watergate affair and that Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) should head it.

The vote, taken on a show of hands, makes it virtually certain that there will be a major Senate investigation of allegations of Republican political espionage against Democrats during the 1972 election campaign, including alleged bugging of Democratic headquarters at the Watergate Hotel.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) last weekend released a letter to Ervin urging him, as chairman of the Senate Government Operations Committee and of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, to head up the probe. He promised Ervin full legal powers and backing.

So far, Ervin, snowbound in North Carolina yesterday, hasn't announced whether he will agree to head the study, and, if so, whether he will do it through Government Operations or Constitutional Rights. Yesterday's vote means that there will be a probe regardless of who heads it, and that Ervin is the party's unanimous choice to do so.

According to senators present, Majority Whip Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) raised the question of the Watergate probe, and Mansfield outlined his determination to go ahead and his desire to have Ervin head it. The 14-member committee, policy-making arm of the 57 Senate Democrats, then voted unanimously.

Democratic anger over the acts allegedly committed by Republicans during the campaign is widespread. Byrd, for example, who has often had friendly relations with the administration, said several days ago, "I don't think any party in power should be allowed to commit acts of political sabotage, slander and libel in an attempt to destroy another po-

litical party and its leader, as alleged here." Mansfield has called the purported acts of political sabotage a threat to the entire constitutional system.

The White House has denied most of the incidents and has said it is convinced, from its own investigation, that no one currently on Mr. Nixon's staff had anything to do with the incidents.

The idea of a Senate Watergate probe first came up Oct. 12, when Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Administrative Practice and Procedure Subcommittee, informed other subcommittee members by letter that he was instructing the staff to undertake a preliminary inquiry and issue subpoenas. This came just after the House Banking Committee refused to authorize Chairman Wright Patman (D-Tex.) to go ahead with a probe with full legal powers.

Kennedy, however, has always been reluctant to lead the full-scale Senate probe. Mansfield said last weekend that a probe headed by Ervin would be less vulnerable to attack on political grounds, and said Kennedy agreed with him.

Most Democrats agree with Mansfield that Ervin, 76, a former judge, a completely fair-minded Southern conservative who is devoted to individual liberties and the right of privacy but has frequently supported the administration on the war and on domestic issues, would have greater credibility against charges that he is engaging in politics.