

Bug Testimony Leaves Senate In a Quandary

By Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein
Washington Post Staff Writers

The secret testimony of convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. before a select Senate investigating committee appears to have a double edge that is both encouraging and discouraging to members of the panel who seek definitive answers to the Watergate mysteries.

The information McCord has provided thus far, according to Senate sources, has been extremely valuable because of the numerous leads it provided concerning the possible involvement in the bugging of high Nixon administration officials.

The testimony has been a disappointment in that it is based not on what McCord observed but rather on what he heard from others, the sources said.

Continuing to move for open public hearings in the near future, Senate sources said that three persons named by McCord during a 4½-hour session with the committee on Wednesday were subpoenaed yesterday to appear for secret testimony.

The names of the persons could not be learned last night. One source said they were three low-level workers in the Nixon campaign.

According to Senate sources, McCord testifies under oath that he was told by his principal superior in the Watergate conspiracy that former Attorney General John N. Mitchell approved plans and the budget for the bugging operations.

According to the sources, McCord said he was told of Mitchell's involvement by former White House aide G. Gordon Liddy, who also was convicted in the case.

In addition, McCord also testified that he was told by Liddy and former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt Jr., another conspirator, that presidential counsel John W. Dean II and former White

House assistant Jeb Stuart Magruder had advance knowledge of the illegal wiretap operation, the sources said.

The Senate sources also reported that McCord testified that he received "second-hand information" implicating Charles W. Colson, then a key Nixon aide and a special White House counsel, in the electronic surveillance.

Mitchell, Dean, Magruder and Colson have all denied any involvement or knowledge in the bugging.

Yesterday, a spokesman for the President's re-election committee, which Mitchell headed until resigning last July 1, issued the following statement for Mitchell:

"I deeply resent the slanderous and false statements about me concerning the Watergate matter reported as being based on hearsay and leaked out of the Ervin Committee.

Headed by Sen. Sam J. Ervin . . . I previously denied any prior knowledge of or involvement in the Watergate affair and again reaffirm such denials."

Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), a member of the Watergate committee, said that only "one-tenth" of the information provided by McCord to the committee was reported in news accounts yesterday.

After a press conference yesterday, Weicker, a 41-year-old maverick Republican, confirmed the accuracy of news reports saying that McCord implicated Mitchell, Dean, Magruder and Colson.

However, Weicker said that McCord gave "no corroborative evidence" to back up his charges.

Weicker said that "an attempt is being made to create the belief that G. Gordon Liddy is the beginning and the end of this operation." Based on conversations with administration officials, Weicker said that this includes an attempt to keep the Senate investigation focused on Liddy, who is expected to remain silent and not cooperate with the Senate or federal grand jury investigations.

Weicker said that the Senate committee should not "carry this case on the back of this man (Liddy), now being tossed out as the trail to follow, tossed out as the trail to follow."

Instead, Weicker criticized the "excessive concentration on the Watergate bugging" and a failure to adequately focus attention on other allegations of a broader campaign of political espionage and sabotage conceived and run by White House aides.

Based on information that he said he received from a "cabinet-level" official, Weicker said he "thinks" he knows the name of a high presidential aide who is still on the White House staff and headed the total espionage operation.

Weicker declined to name either the "cabinet-level" official or the White House aide.

Liddy, a former FBI agent, prosecutor and finance counsel to the President's re-election committee, was the highest official convicted at the Watergate trial in January. The prosecutors described him as the "boss" of the Watergate operation.

Sworn testimony at the Watergate trial by Magruder, the No. 2 official at the Nixon committee, indicated that Liddy had been given \$235,000 in cash to conduct an intelligence-gathering operation against the Democrats. Magruder said the operation was to be toally "legal" and "ethical."

The prosecutors said that Liddy then "twisted" the assignment into the illegal Watergate bugging.

Hugh W. Sloan Jr., the former Nixon committee treasurer, testified that Mitchell gave indirect approval of the disbursement of the \$235,000 in cash to Liddy.

In September, The Washington Post quoted sources involved in the Watergate investigation as saying that Mitchell personally controlled disbursements from a secret cash fund which financed the Watergate.

The latest Watergate developments began last Friday when a letter from McCord to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica, the presiding judge in the Watergate trial, was read in open court.

In the letter, McCord charged that he knew of "perjury," "political pressure" and the involvement of others in the Watergate.

After preliminary meetings with Samuel Dash, the Senate committee's chief counsel, McCord requested Wednesday's meetings with the full committee to tell his story under oath.