

Panel Says Haldeman Not Tied to Watergate

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The Senate's Watergate investigating committee announced yesterday that it has received no evidence linking White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman "with any illegal activities in connection with the presidential campaign of 1972."

Sens. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) and Howard Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), the committee's chairman and vice chairman, issued a two-sentence statement expressing the panel's concern with "certain news media accounts attributable to this committee inferring that Mr. Haldeman . . . was involved in the break-in and bugging of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate and other illegal activities."

"In the interest of fairness and justice," the statement added, "the committee wishes to state publicly that as of this time it has received no evidence of any nature" connecting Haldeman to any illegal activities.

The committee's statement was apparently prompted by inaccurate news reports in some publications that Haldeman had been implicated in the bugging by convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr., who testified before a closed-door meeting of the seven-member panel last Wednesday.

(In its account, The Washington Post quoted Senate sources who denied that McCord's testimony had in any way implicated Haldeman in the bugging or other illegal activities.)

The committee's statement on Haldeman came one day after a member of the panel, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-See WATERGATE, A16, Col. 1

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Conn.), called for the resignation of the powerful White House chief of staff.

Weicker, who on Tuesday said that Haldeman "clearly has to accept responsibility" for a broad campaign of political espionage and sabotage conducted on behalf of President Nixon's re-election, said yesterday, "I concur with the statement" of the committee.

The senator noted that he has said he has no evidence that Haldeman was involved in illegal activities, but rather has charged that the White House chief of staff set a tone in the 1972 campaign that condoned political spying and sabotage. Without citing specific evidence, Weicker has said that high Republican officials told him that "as to the general campaign tactic (of espionage and sabotage) involved here, Mr. Haldeman knew what was going on."

At the Western White House in San Clemente, Calif., Gerald Warren, deputy White House press secretary, responded to the Ervin committee statement about Haldeman by saying, "That is a step in the right direction."

On Monday, the White House sharply criticized the committee, which Ron Ziegler, presidential press secretary, said was "plagued by irresponsible leaks of tidal wave proportions."

The White House and Ervin still are in conflict whether White House aides can be called to testify before the committee under oath in public sessions.

President Nixon has said he will not let his aides appear in such "formal sessions" before any congressional committee.

For his part, Sen. Ervin has insisted that the presidential aides, including Haldeman if necessary, must testify if subpoenaed and will be arrested and tried for contempt of the Senate if they refuse.

Sources in the Nixon administration and federal law enforcement agencies told The Washington Post last fall that a campaign of espionage and sabotage conducted on behalf of the President's re-election was, in the words of one, "a Haldeman operation."

According to the sources, the FBI uncovered no evidence in the Watergate investigation that Haldeman was involved in the bugging of Democratic headquarters.

Haldeman is known to have told others recently that he

ordered the surveillance of Democratic presidential candidates, but maintains its purpose was merely to obtain transcripts of all their public statements. In these conversations with others, Haldeman has given the impression that he believes the "surveillance" — reportedly his word for the activity — somehow got out of hand and began to include unauthorized acts.

According to reliable Senate sources, Watergate conspirator McCord's testimony about Haldeman was brief and

included a statement that he received no information indicating that Haldeman knew of the bugging.

McCord, the former security coordinator of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, reportedly told the Senate committee that he once sent Haldeman a memo dealing with routine security matters and, in answer to a question, said Haldeman had a general knowledge of the activities and personnel of the re-election committee.

In other testimony, McCord

said he had been told by his coconspirator and former White House aide, G. Gordon Liddy, that the budget and plans for the Watergate operation were approved during a February, 1972, meeting in the office of then-Attorney General John N. Mitchell that was also attended by White House counsel John W. Dean III and former presidential assistant Jeb Stuart Magruder, the deputy director of the Nixon campaign.

McCord also reportedly testified that another Watergate conspirator, former White

House consultant E. Howard Hunt Jr., gave him the clear impression that Charles W. Colson, then special counsel to the President, also had advance knowledge of the Watergate bugging plans. Mitchell, Dean, Magruder and Colson have all denied any advance knowledge or involvement in the bugging, as has Haldeman.

In a related development yesterday, U.S. District Court Chief Judge John J. Sirica granted the four Watergate conspirators from Miami immunity from further prosecu-

tion and ordered them to testify before a grand jury that has reopened its probe of the illegal electronic surveillance.

Sirica granted the four men immunity after they invoked their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in an earlier session with the grand jury.

The questions they refused to answer were read in open court and included inquiries about any other illegal electronic surveillance they might have knowledge of.

The four men are Bernard

L. Barker, Virgilio Gonzalez, Frank A. Sturgis, and Eugenio R. Martinez. By all accounts they were the lowest-level operatives in the conspiracy. They all pleaded guilty to all charges against them at the January Watergate trial.

The four Miami men and McCord are scheduled to appear before the grand jury today. It is anticipated that McCord will be granted immunity from additional prosecution today in exchange for his cooperation and testimony before the grand jury.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst, who was on Capitol Hill yesterday, made the following comment to reporters about the Watergate:

"I can't help but believe that there are some people in this country who would like to prove that the President of the United States had those earphones over his ears. You know, listening to the electronic surveillance. They have very, very narrow attitudes and narrow objectives."