

White House Aides May Give Testimony

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under intense pressure from Republicans, the White House was said Friday to be inching closer to an agreement to let presidential aides testify about the Watergate case to Senate investigators.

Sources close to the Senate investigation said "there is some movement along those lines."

Presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler confirmed that negotiations are under way.

But he said the White House is concerned that testimony by aides, if it is allowed, not interfere with the doctrines of separation of powers and executive privilege.

Both Ziegler and Senate sources denied that an agreement has been reached.

Meanwhile, a source said public hearings before the Senate Watergate investigating committee have been postponed until sometime in May. These hearings will look into, but will not be confined to, the break-in and bugging of Democratic headquarters at the Watergate complex last summer.

Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr., D-N.C., the committee chairman, had expressed hope the hearings could begin considerably earlier than May.

In a separate development, convicted Watergate burglar James W. McCord met privately with the investigating committee's top aides. Neither he nor committee counsel Samuel Dash would comment on what was discussed.

Attorneys for McCord, who was once security chief for the Committee for Re-election of the President, said Thursday he had given up plans to hold a news conference to tell his story of the events and background of the case.

McCord's attorneys said the session with reporters was called off at Ervin's request.

Republican officeholders continued to aim a storm of criticism at the White House and its handling of the case.

Sen. William B. Saxbe, R-Ohio, said he just does not believe assertions by members of Nixon's staff that they knew nothing about the bugging of Democratic headquarters and other alleged spying and sabotage aimed at Democrats.

The chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, Rep. John Rostenkowski of Illinois, said, "The continual mystery surrounding Watergate is hurting the image of President Nixon and the Republican Party in the eyes of people everywhere."

Rhodes urged Nixon to take all steps necessary to clear up the case.

A spokesman for Vice President Spiro T. Agnew reported Agnew is distressed over the "turmoil" surrounding the Watergate affair and "wants those who are guilty of any wrongdoing prosecuted."

However, he said Agnew supports the White House position that no one there had any involvement or prior knowledge of the case.

Earlier, the Los Angeles Times quoted an unnamed associate of Agnew as saying the vice president is "appalled" at the case and its handling by the administration.

McCord's attorney, Bernard Fensterwald, said McCord had led FBI investigators to four locations in Maryland Thursday where he had stashed away electronic bugging equipment purchased with funds from Nixon's re-election committee. Fensterwald said McCord had vouchers to prove where the purchase money came from.

The existence of the gear lends support to widespread reports that the Watergate bugging crew intended, before it was caught inside Democratic offices last June, to bug Sen. George McGovern's presidential headquarters and the Miami convention telephones of top Democratic party officials.

One of the Senate investigating committee staff members, private investigator Harold K. Lipset, resigned his job because he feared the committee would be embarrassed by impending news reports of his background. Lipset pleaded guilty in 1971 to a charge of wiretapping. Lipset said committee chairman Ervin hadn't been aware of the wiretap matter when he was hired.

Attorneys for the Nixon re-election committee, involved in civil proceedings growing out of the Watergate case, said they will continue taking a deposition from McCord next Friday morning. They said they have asked him to bring with him "all documents, tapes, bills, electronic equipment and anything else relating to the case."

DeVan Shumway, spokesman for the re-election committee, voiced support for a decision by the judge in the Republican civil case against the Democrats to make all transcripts of McCord's testimony open to the press and public.