

Dean Claims Plot to Limit Disclosures

By Laurence Meyer
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Former White House counsel John W. Dean III charged yesterday that there is a concerted effort to 'get' him, to limit his testimony in the Watergate investigation and to discredit him personally in the hope of "discrediting my testimony."

Dean's statement, released through his lawyer, Robert C. McCandless, is the latest move in an intricate and occasionally public struggle going on among federal prosecutors, the Senate select committee investigating the Watergate affair, Dean and his friends and the White House.

Fired by President Nixon on April 30, Dean has become a central figure in public and private discussions of the Watergate scandal. He is said by associates to be prepared to give testimony that he feels will indicate that President Nixon was aware of the alleged

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coverup of the Watergate scandal last year. In addition, Dean is said to be prepared to give testimony criminally linking former top White House aides H.R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman to the Watergate affair and the alleged coverup.

At the same time, reports are circulating questioning Dean's integrity and suggesting that he has no proof of Mr. Nixon's knowledge or involvement in the bugging or the alleged cover-up. One White House official called a reporter yesterday to urge that he take a closer look at Dean, emphasizing that Dean cannot be trusted.

On the other hand, federal investigators reportedly have evidence showing that Dean was involved in the planning and finning of the bugging of the Democratic Party's Watergate headquarters and the subsequent coverup.

In his statement yesterday, Dean publicly disavowed any connection between himself and what has been reported about the evidence he is prepared to give. "The news stories quoting unidentified sources and speculating on the nature of my testimony do not come from me, have not been authorized by me, nor have they come from my attorneys. The information contained in these stories is neither complete nor accurate. I have not, and will not, lead my testimony to the media."

At the same time Dean addressed himself however obliquely to the struggle—both institutional and personal—that began several weeks ago over his role in the investigation, his honesty and his motives.

"There have been discussions," Dean said, "within the White House during the past four to five months as to how to end the Watergate matter. But these discussions always ended with an unwillingness to accept the truth for what it meant. That unwillingness to accept the truth still prevails among some who are affected by the truth. I have always been—as I am now—prepared to have the truth emerge. But I am not willing to see the truth distorted further, nor am I willing to shoulder the blame for those unwilling to accept the truth."

"I am very aware that there is an ongoing effort to limit or prevent my testifying fully and freely. Efforts have been made to prevent me from obtaining relevant information and records. Attempts have been made to influence the handling of my testimony by the prosecutors. Restrictions have been placed on the scope of my testimony as it relates to the White House. And blatant efforts have been made to publicly intimidate me."

"Finally," Dean said, "I am, of course, aware of the efforts to discredit me personally in the hope of discrediting my testimony. In fact, I have learned from several good friends that there is a concerted effort to 'get me.' Indeed, this is a most unfortunate attitude, for I seek to 'get' no one, rather I seek to get only the truth."

"This infamous matter has already lingered too long and done too much damage to the processes of government. It will only end when the truth is told. Those who believe that they can 'get me' and discredit my testimony with absurd or personal attacks are forgetting what I believe is a basic fact of life—ultimately, the truth always emerges. The truth will emerge in this Watergate case," Dean said.

Both Newsweek and Time magazines carried stories this week saying Dean had evidence he believes shows Mr. Nixon knew about the alleged Watergate coverup last year.

The New York Times reported in yesterday's editions that Senate and federal investigators say "on the basis of extended interviews with John Dean III, they believe he has no evidence to link President Nixon either to prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging or to any subsequent cover-up."

At the same time, however, associates of Dean insist that Newsweek and Time stories did not come from Dean. Moreover, they said Dean has information that forms a circumstantial case to demonstrate Mr. Nixon's complicity in the alleged coverup. Dean has nothing as "hard" as photographs "or anything signed" by the President, however, one associate said.

Dean's statement yesterday and the events of the past several weeks, reflect two separate but intertwined struggles. On the one hand is the clash between the Senate select committee investigating the Watergate affair and the alleged coverup and the prosecutors in-

vestigating the same incidents.

On the other hand is a struggle Dean referred to in his statement, between himself and adversaries in the White House.

The competition between the Senate committee and the prosecution, according to a benign interpretation, reflects their different missions. Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), chairman of the committee, said yesterday that the sole function of a congressional committee is to determine if existing laws are sufficient and whether new laws are necessary.

Calling the upcoming hearings "the most important investigation ever entrusted to the Congress," Ervin said, "It is much more important for the American people to find out the truth about the Watergate case than sending one or two people to jail. It is much more important. But our investigation can't impede the investigation in the courts. Certainly, there can't be much more publicity."

The prosecution's perspective, however, is entirely different under this interpretation. The prosecutors are not concerned with determining whether new laws are necessary but with enforcing existing laws. One prosecution source gave an indication of the friction between the Senate committee and the prosecutors when he said, referring to the committee probe, "It's certainly not helping us."

The Times quoted one "source close to the prosecutors" yesterday as saying, "The Senate is dismantling the criminal case before our eyes."

Samuel Dash, chief counsel to the committee, was quoted as replying, "I'm cooperating with them. You ask if they're cooperating with us."

The most recent salvo to be fired in this war of nerves concerned immunity for Dean. Monday it was reported that the prosecution had decided against granting immunity from prosecution to Dean for any involvement in crimes he might describe while testifying. The prosecutors are said to believe that they have already debriefed Dean and that they know everything he might say.

Dean's associates contend that Dean told prosecutors only enough to demonstrate that he has full knowledge and was being honest, that he gave a partial version of what he knows about Halde- man and Ehrlichman and completely avoided the sub- ject of Mr. Nixon's alleged rôle.

Neither the Senate com- mittee nor its staff has in- terviewed Dean. Only one committee member, Sen. Lo- well P. Weicker Jr. (R- Conn.), has spoken directly with Dean, according to reli- able sources.

The Senate committee voted Tuesday to seek im- munity for Dean, but not to actually grant immunity to him until he has been inter- viewed by the staff.

Sen. Ervin said yesterday that it was his understand- ing that the Justice Depart- ment has decided to invoke its legal right to delay the granting of immunity for 30 days in order to give the prosecutors an opportunity to indict Dean before he test- ifies.

Justice Department offi- cials told The Washington Post, however, that a tenta- tive decision—subject to re- versal— has been made to allow Dean's immunity to go through without invoking the 30-day delay. These offi- cials say they see many rea- sons to oppose immunity, but acknowledge that the political repercussions of a delay could be serious.

A more sinister interpreta- tion of the institutional con- flict—suggested by a lawyer for a potential defendant in one instance and by a Uni- ted States senator in the other—is that the members of the committee are twist- ing the investigation to their own personal uses while the administration is trying to shield high officials from prosecution. This sort of suspicion, whether valid or not, was seen as further com- plicating an already complex situation.

One lawyer representing a potential defendant in a Watergate criminal trial said that the Senate com- mittee is laying the ground- work for the appeal of any convictions in a second Wa- tergate trial. "They are right now manufacturing up there a defense, and it's just tickling everybody to death," the lawyer said.

The publicity resulting from the committee's inves- tigation and hearings, the lawyer said, will give a de- fense attorney strong argu- ments for reversing any con- viction. Referring to the committee, the lawyer said, "These guys are going to have a stomach ache when it's all over, but right now it's too sweet for them to keep their fingers out of the candy sack."