

# Watergate Has Hampered Functioning of Congress

## Preoccupation With Hearings Keeping Key Senate Leaders From Work on Important Legislative Business

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WASHINGTON, May 28  
An amateur lobbyist walked into the office of a key Senate aide one day last week to talk about legislation that would cut off funds for bombing Cambodia.

The lobbyist, Jack Moskowitz of Common Cause, found the aide with his feet propped up on his desk and his eyes glued to the television set in the corner, where James W. McCord Jr. was spinning his version of the Watergate tale.

"I could hardly get his attention," Mr. Moskowitz recalled over the weekend. "It was like that all week. If you wanted to talk with somebody, you had to tear him away from his TV, and even after you'd done that you didn't know whether he was really listening to you or to the tube."

Such was the state of Congress in May, 1973: Preoccupied with the scandal that was unfolding on television and in hearing rooms throughout the Capitol, unable to concentrate on routine legislative business, and, in the words of a lobbyist for business interests, "putting everything off to mañana."

### Business is Slowed

From interviews last week with lobbyists, members of Congress and their aides, it was clear that the regular business of Congress will be deeply affected in the weeks and months ahead by this absorption with the Watergate case.

The Watergate matter may delay, for example, work on the multibillion-dollar, three-year highway bill that is now before a House-Senate conference committee. The measure, which was passed by the House and Senate this spring in widely different forms, could shape the nature of transportation in the United States for years to come.

The conferees will begin in the next week or so to debate the most controversial question in the bill — whether urban areas should be allowed to use their share of Federal highway money to build mass transit systems.

The ranking Senate Republican in the conference and a co-sponsor of the mass transit provision is Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, who is also the top Republican on the Senate committee that is looking into the Watergate affair.

### Baker Role Vital

Other Senators on the conference committee and staff members who are working on the highway bill agree that it will be impossible to resolve the mass transit question unless Senator Baker devotes a great deal of time to the matter.

that may be delayed because of the Watergate hearings is the bill recommended by the Joint Budget Committee, which would set up special committees in the House and Senate to balance revenues and expenditures.

Before that bill can get to the Senate floor, it must go through the Government Operations Committee, whose chairman is Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. Senator Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat, is, of course, also chairman of the Watergate committee and is spending most of his time on its hearings.

### Ervin Also Occupied

Senator Ervin is also the key Senator involved in the questions of executive privilege, newsmen's privilege and impoundment of funds, and legislation in those areas has bogged down in the last month. The chief counsel of Senator Ervin's Subcommittee on Separation of Powers, Rufus Edmiston, has left the subcommittee for the time being to serve as deputy counsel on the Watergate committee.

Moreover, in addition to the Watergate committee, five permanent committees or subcommittees have become involved in the Watergate case in its spin-offs. They are the Senate Armed Services, Judiciary and Foreign Relations Committees and subcommittees of the Senate Appropriations and House Armed Services Committees.

Staff members of some of those panels say that they are several weeks behind in their regular work because of the time they have spent on Watergate.

Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, the Democratic leader, is concerned about the preoccupation with the Watergate case. He gave a talk at a meeting of Senate Democrats last week at which he said:

"During the next few months, it is apparent that Congress will be operating in an atmosphere, supercharged with the shocking revelations of the Watergate affair.

"However, the regular business of the Senate will continue in legislative committees and on the floor of the Senate. That business cannot and will not be neglected. The stability of the nation requires our continuing attention to routine and ordinary matters, now, perhaps, more than ever."

### Delay Is Apparent

Nonetheless, it was quite clear that some of this regular business had already been put off.

A Democratic Senator, for instance, has had his staff working all year to prepare for hearings that he hoped would educate the public about serious social problems in the country.

The hearings have now been postponed indefinitely because the Senator realizes that, in the midst of the Watergate developments, the press and general public would pay little attention to his hearings.

Furthermore, some of the events that have taken place on Capitol Hill in recent weeks have received little public attention because newsmen who would normally have covered

them have been working on Watergate.

Early this month, for example, Senator Walter F. Mondale, Democrat of Minnesota, and Casper W. Weinberger, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, engaged in sharp debate at a Finance Committee hearing on the Administration's proposed social services regulations.

At the end, Mr. Weinberger was forced to admit that the Administration's plan would serve to keep some people on welfare. That concession turned the committee's powerful chairman, Russell P. Long, Democrat of Louisiana, against the proposal.

### Big Story in Back Pages

In normal times, that would have been a major news story, but these days, with Watergate dominating the headlines, the matter was buried in the back pages of most newspapers.

Representative James A. Burke, a Massachusetts Democrat, noted last week that the House Ways and Means Committee had been holding hearings on trade legislation and that most days there was not a single reporter at the meetings.

Among the people most disconcerted by the Watergate affair are the lobbyists for special causes. "I feel when I send out my newsletter on air pollution as if I'm dropping it into a bottomless well," one of these lobbyists remarked.

But the lobbyists, like nearly everyone else in the capital, are preoccupied by Watergate.

"Look," said Mr. Moskowitz, the Common Cause lobbyist who is working on the Cambodia bombing regulation. "When I see you on the street, what do we talk about? Cambodia? Hell no. We talk about Watergate."