

Gurney Wants Watergate Panel To Resolve Nixon Issue Quickly

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WASHINGTON, May 31—A Republican member of the Senate Watergate committee said today that the panel should move "faster and more decisively" on the question of whether President Nixon played a role in the Watergate scandal.

Senator Edward J. Gurney of Florida contended that in its initial hearings, the committee had heard "minor witnesses" who offered hearsay testimony but "shed little real light on the involvement of the President."

Mr. Gurney—in a letter to the chairman, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina — proposed calling seven of Mr. Nixon's ranking advisers as soon as the hearings resumed Tuesday.

Vice President Agnew made a similar appeal yesterday. He said in an interview that if the Senate would not wait until the Federal courts explored possible criminal charges, he would "like to see it all get dredged and get it over with."

Senator Gurney denied in an interview this afternoon that his call for more urgency had been politically motivated, rather, he said, the relatively slow pace has interfered with "the conduct of the Presidency."

"The Watergate hearing hangs over Washington like a black thundercloud with everyone wondering if the storm will break," Senator Gurney wrote in his letter to Senator Ervin, copies of which went to other members of the panel.

"In the meantime, the Government has either ground to a halt or is proceeding at a snail's pace," the letter said.

Senator Gurney told the chairman that if the committee continued at its present pace there would be a "stream of scare headlines prompted by more hearsay and innuendo."

In his office this afternoon, Mr. Gurney said that he would not object to dealing with less important witnesses first if the hearings were attracting less widespread attention.

Under the present schedule, the committee will first hear Sally J. Harmony, a former secretary at the Committee for the Re-election of the President

who worked for G. Gordon Liddy, one of the seven Watergate conspirators.

Mr. Gurney proposed calling H. R. Haldeman, former White House chief of staff; John D. Ehrlichman, the President's former assistant for domestic affairs, and John W. Dean 3d, the ousted White House counsel.

The Senator also wants to hear immediately from former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans, former special White House counsel Charles W. Colson and former Nixon lawyer Herbert W. Kalmbach.

A somewhat similar proposal was first advanced last week by Senator Herman E. Talmadge, Democrat of Georgia. But the majority, led by Senator Ervin and the Republican vice chairman, Howard H. Baker of Tennessee, were said to have felt that it is essential first to lay a foundation for the crucial testimony.

This has involved background about the political operations of the White House and the Nixon re-election committee and details of the June 17 break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

Also, a number of committee sources have stressed that the Watergate investigation covers important issue aside from the President and that Mr. Nixon's role should not dominate totally.



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Senator Edward J. Gurney, Florida Republican and a member of the Senate select committee on Watergate, listening to testimony at hearings two weeks ago.