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Democrats Got Break-In Warning

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Six weeks before the first Watergate break-in, Democratic National Chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien was warned that the Nixon campaign was forming a political espionage unit that would probably try to bug the Democratic National Committee.

The Democrats checked out the warning, which came from a private New York investigator in mid-April, 1972, but took no action because it was not substantiated and because they had no money for counter-measures.

The first break-in of their national party headquarters and the placing of wiretaps there occurred on May 28, 1972. A second break-in, on June 17, resulted in the arrest of the Watergate burglars.

O'Brien confirmed yesterday that he had received the warning through an intermediary, and that an aide, John Stewart, then the DNC's director of communications, had talked to the private investigator. Stewart, in a legal deposition in the Watergate case, has identified the man as A. J. Woolston-Smith of New York.

Stewart also confirmed that the investigator had told him that "information in his business, the intelligence community, was that there was going to be a fairly concerted effort to bug the Democrats in the campaign."

"In retrospect we should have paid more attention to it," O'Brien said, "but my recollection was that there were no specifics or clear lines. I don't recall I got any recommendation about what to do about it, and if there was one, the question was how did we pay for it?"

The DNC was so short of funds at the time, he said, that the possibility of hiring a single security guard was dismissed.

Stewart, after talking to the New York investigator, reported what he had been told to Stanley L. Greigg, deputy chairman of the DNC pointing out to Greigg that the warning was "unsubstantiated."

"I didn't think the information was terribly detailed," Greigg said yesterday. "I didn't attach very much significance to it, and we didn't have the finances for an elaborate security program."

The investigator, who insisted on anonymity at the time, said in a New York interview earlier this week that he had concluded that the Nixon campaign was developing a political espionage capability through reports that it was hiring former CIA and FBI men.

Both Stewart and Greigg said yesterday they were questioned about the warning by Kenneth Parkinson, lawyer for the Committee

for the Re-election of the President, in separate depositions taken earlier this year in the Re-election Committee's countersuit against the DNC. The Democrats are suing the Nixon committee for \$6.4 million in damages in the Watergate break-in.

In Stewart's deposition, the DNC official said he had been warned by Woolston-Smith that the Nixon campaign was preparing "to eavesdrop electronically on the DNC" and otherwise engage in "spying on what we were doing."

Shortly after the Watergate burglars were caught, Stewart said in his deposition, he phoned the private investigator and told him, "It seems that what you said was going to happen happened." Woolston-Smith replied, Stewart said, "Well, it doesn't surprise me because I was reasonably sure that was what was going to happen."