

Asked Role In Bug Probe

By Timothy S. Robinson
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The ranking Republican on the Senate Watergate committee said yesterday that he was contacted by a White House aide earlier this year who asked to have "some say" in picking the committee's counsel.

Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) said he immediately rejected the overture by Wally Johnson, who represented himself as the "contact point" at the White House for any coordination between it and the Senate Watergate unit.

Baker told of the telephone call in response to questioning on ABC Television's "Issues and Answers" concerning the relationship between the White House and the Senate committee. He said that was the only contact the unit has had with the White House since its probe began, other than asking for an organizational chart.

Baker said he had discussed the Watergate investigation only once with the President, and that conversation occurred before the investigation began.

"I spoke to him briefly and urged him not to invoke the doctrine of executive privilege, but rather to send the White House staff freely, voluntarily and quickly" to testify before the committee, Baker said.

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Baker and several other Senators flew with the President aboard Air Force One to Illinois on Friday, but Baker said he did not speak to the President during that flight.

While Baker said he found "no substantial sentiment" for impeachment of the President now, he thought that sentiment would grow as the hearings continue.

"There may be more (calls for impeachment), but I don't believe at this moment that it is likely to reach substantial proportions," he said.

Baker said he had not yet been briefed by the Senate committee staff on its five-hour interview with former White House Counsel John Dean III. He predicted, however, that Dean "will

tell a rather complete story," that won't be hampered by claims of executive privilege or an attorney-client relationship between Dean and the President.

The committee is scheduled to meet today in executive session to hear Dean's testimony and decide if it is protected by an attorney-client privilege before Dean begins giving public testimony on Tuesday.

Baker said yesterday that he did not think "the usual and traditional and historic role of attorney-client would obtain" in Dean's case.

Dean has told investigators that he met up to 40 times with the President this year, and Baker said yesterday the committee will "carefully examine and explore very full" those meetings.

Baker also said yesterday

he disagreed with Vice President Agnew and a special Watergate Prosecutor Archibald Cox, both of whom have claimed that the committee's televised hearings may damage the possibility of criminal prosecutions.

"I am convinced that we can only conduct these hearings in a way that will not prejudice the right of a fair trial of any potential defendant, nor will it prejudice the right to a fair trial for the government for the prosecution," Baker commented.

In other Watergate-related developments yesterday:

• Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) expressed fears that Dean's potentially explosive testimony would further undermine Nixon's bargaining position in this week's summit talks with

Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev.

"This is not the best environment to negotiate in a summit meeting... I am sure that most thoughtful Americans must realize that, with television going full blast this coming week with Mr. Dean, with all that he is going to say," Jackson said on CBS television's "Face the Nation."

• Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) said President Nixon deserves credit for going ahead with his meetings with Brezhnev despite the Watergate scandal.

"The promise of increased Soviet-American cooperation in reducing world tensions is too great to be postponed. The President has made the right decision in proceeding with the summit talks," Percy said in a statement.