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Rebuttal to Dean Hinted

Washington

The White House may provide rebuttal witnesses to counter the expected damaging testimony of John W. Dean III at Senate Watergate hearings next week.

A high administration official said yesterday the White House is discussing plans to offer persons named by Dean — or other officials familiar with events he may relate — to testify after Dean makes his charges.

Dean, whom President Nixon fired as his counsel on April 30, will begin nationally televised testimony Monday before the Senate's special committee probing the Watergate scandal. Because of his key role in the affair, he is expected to spend three or four days in the witness chair.

APPROVAL

Any witnesses offered by the White House in rebuttal could not testify unless approved by the committee. A committee source said such a decision would require action by the panel as a whole.

Designation of such witnesses, the administration official said, "depends upon what Dean says. We'll have to see who he mentions."

"We might send someone, just as Gerald Alch testified on his own behalf."

Alch, former attorney for convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr., asked for — and received — permission to give Senate testimony last month. He did so after

McCord accused him of suggesting that government records could be doctored to establish a false defense for McCord that the Central Intelligence Agency had instigated the Watergate break-in. Alch denied the charge.

One name being discussed as a possible rebuttal witness to Dean is Richard A. Moore, special counsel to Mr. Nixon.

Moore, along with departed White House assistants H. R. Haldeman and John D.

Ehrlichman, attended a meeting at La Costa Country Club in San Diego county last February 10 at which Dean has claimed payments to the Watergate defendants were discussed. Moore also attended a meeting last March with Dean and Mr. Nixon.

It is understood that Moore might corroborate parts of Dean's testimony while challenging other portions. Moore has declined comment through his attorney, Herbert J. Miller.



John W. Dean III (right) and his attorney, Charles N. Shaffer, arrived at closed hearings this week.

WITNESSES

In the view of some White House officials, Haldeman and Ehrlichman may be key rebuttal witnesses to Dean. The committee has long planned to require their testimony.

Along with charging that Mr. Nixon attempted to cover up the Watergate affair, Dean is expected to testify that Haldeman and Ehrlichman played pivotal roles in the coverup beginning soon after the June 17, 1972, break-in.

Ehrlichman is reported to be compiling a lengthy statement in his defense—perhaps for submission to the committee before his oral testimony.

"He'll come out of his corner swinging," an associate of Ehrlichman said.

REBUTTAL

The White House has already provided the committee with a rebuttal to Dean's testimony in the form of brief descriptions of meetings this year between Dean and Mr. Nixon.

According to the White House documents, Mr. Nixon did not become aware of a Watergate coverup until Dean hinted at his own involvement on March 21, the date he also said Haldeman and Ehrlichman "probably" were involved.

Mr. Nixon's strategists additionally have submitted a series of questions to committee staff members to be asked of Dean, according to published reports yesterday. Most congressional committees accept written questions from parties in conflict.

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