

# A Witness Contradicts John Dean

## Washington

A White House official appearing before the Senate Watergate committee yesterday contradicted charges by John W. Dean III that President Nixon had known of efforts to cover up the scandal as early as last September.

The official, Richard A. Moore, testified that Dean, the former White House counsel, told him on March 20 that he had not informed the President and that he did not think anyone else had done so.

Dean, in five days of testimony before the Senate panel late last month, said he felt Mr. Nixon signified an awareness on September 15 that White House advisers and campaign organization officials were involved in the scandal.

The one-time counsel to the President, who was fired April 30, told the committee that aspects of the coverup activity arose also in conversations with Mr. Nixon last February and March.

Moore, who has been a special counsel to the Presi-

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dent since 1971 and who was said by Dean to have discussed many of the Watergate issues with the former adviser, gave a broadly different statement.

"... Nothing said in my meetings with Dean or my meetings with the President suggests in any way that before March 21 the President had known, or that Dean believed he had known, of any involvement of White House personnel in the bugging or the coverup," Moore said.

Moore came to the witness table after the committee concluded its examination of John N. Mitchell with an aggressive probing of his credibility as a witness in the defense of the President.

Moore, who is scheduled to return for further ques-

tioning today, also underwent close interrogation after reading a 20-page opening statement.

An assistant counsel to the committee, Terry F. Lenzner, took Moore through a long series of meetings in February and March, in which various administration officials participated.

The White House counsel, fumbling with papers and occasionally flashing an embarrassed smile, said frequently that he could not remember the names of those present or the subject matter that had been discussed.

The significance of sessions before March 21 is based on the President's statement that on that date he learned for the first time of "serious charges" about the Watergate affair and that he began an investigation of them.

Moore, a 59-year-old Albany, N.Y., native who described himself as "a source of white haired advice and experience whenever the President or the younger men . . . seek my help," said he had urged Dean to tell Mr. Nixon "everything" on March 21.

He discussed a March 14 meeting with the President, Dean, and Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, and subsequent meetings on March 15, 19, and 20 at which only Mr. Nixon, Dean, and Moore were present.

"At no time . . . did anyone say anything in my presence which related to or suggested the existence of any coverup, or any knowledge or involvement by anyone in the White House, then or now, in the Watergate affair," Moore declared.

At the March 20 meeting, he added, "It seemed crystal-clear to me" that the President knew nothing "inconsistent with the previously stated conclusion that the White House was uninvolved."

When that meeting with the President was over, Moore testified, he decided to discuss with Dean the "things that Dean was worried about or had been hinting at to me."

"I said that I had the feeling that the President had no knowledge of the things that were worrying Dean. I asked Dean whether he had

ever told the President about them. Dean replied that he had not, and I asked whether anyone else had. Dean said he didn't think so."

At that time, Moore said, he suggested to Dean that he "go in and tell him what you know, you will feel better, it will be right for him and it will be good for the country."

Dean took the advice, the witness testified, and afterward he informed Moore that "he had told the President everything" and the President had been "surprised."

In an extended verbal duel earlier with the committee's chief counsel, Samuel Dash, Mitchell acknowledged that some of his statements at the hearings differed from his prior statement.

His answer to one question posed under oath last fall had been "equivocal," John Mitchell said. On another point, he said his memory had "failed." And, he said, he had not been "volunteering" information.

"Is there a distinction between your not volunteering anything and lying?" Dash asked.

"I think we would have to find out what the specifics are," Mitchell replied.

"Since you may have given false testimony under oath on prior occasions," Dash demanded near the end of his interrogation, "is there any reason for this committee to believe your testimony before this committee?"

That barbed inquiry was aimed not only at Mitchell but also at the President. A chief feature of this week's testimony by Mr. Nixon's onetime campaign manager was his persistent denial of presidential involvement in the Watergate scandal or its coverup.

Specifically, Dash asked, should the former attorney general be believed on the question of whether he "had any knowledge about the President's knowledge of the coverup or participation in



AP Wirephoto

**RICHARD MOORE**  
He pondered question

the coverup?"

Also at issue, Dash declared, is whether Mitchell should be believed when he denies approving the wiretaps and when he denies "any active part" in the coverup himself and in the payment of hush money to the men captured.

"I disagree, of course, with your interpretation of the matters that you have just read (the comparison of earlier statements with those made this week)," the former attorney general replied.

"As far as the determinations of this committee (on his credibility)," Mitchell continued, "I think they can judge . . . my testimony and make their own conclusions after my appearance here."

In response, Dash noted that in order to believe Mitchell it would be necessary to disbelieve such other key witnesses as James W. McCord Jr., one of the convicted Watergate conspirators; Jeb Sturt Magruder, former deputy director for the Nixon campaign, and "in some respects" Dean.

*New York Times*