

Special Counsel's Testimony

Washington

President Nixon was deeply concerned in May that he had not found out sooner about the Watergate coverup, according to a White House official who saw the President often throughout the spring.

Richard A. Moore, one of the few witnesses before the Senate Watergate committee thus far who still works at the White House, told the committee yesterday that Mr. Nixon remarked to him at a private meeting on May 8:

"I have racked my brain, I have searched my mind. Were there any clues I should have seen that should have tipped me off?"

The President went on to say, according to Moore, that "maybe there were" such clues and that he still wondered whether he should have noticed them, despite the myriad other matters competing for his attention.

This version of the President's frame of mind last spring was the most detailed yet given to the committee and the television audience during the Watergate hearings, and it was painted by a long-time Nixon loyalist who now serves as an adviser on how best to present the President's image in public.

'CLUES'

In an effort to show that there indeed were "clues" to the magnitude of the Watergate scandal that President Nixon should have recognized, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. recounted a long list of newspapers' disclosures in the two months following the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters on June 17, 1972.

Moore said that prior to March 21, the day Dean said he told the President everything about the break-in and the coverup, he certainly had not gone to the President and he didn't know of

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any other White House aide who had. He said this was so despite the fact that they all were familiar with these daily newspaper accounts from the time of the June 17, 1972, bugging incident pointing to high-level White House and campaign committee involvement.

"Didn't what you learned from the press and radio and TV in connection with these matters generate a suspicion in your mind that something was rotten at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President?" asked Ervin.

"Yes — uh — yes," Moore replied.

"Didn't you think you had a duty to go to the President to tell him you suspected something was rotten at the committee and something ought to be done about it?" Ervin demanded.

"Obviously, something was rotten, but I thought the rottenness had been exposed," Moore said, referring to the seven men who subsequently went on trial for conspiracy in the burglary. "The President's view, which was consistent with my view, was that it probably was an unauthorized action."

"Whether it was unauthorized or not, didn't you think someone close to the President should take some action?" Ervin shouted, wagging his finger at the white-haired, nervously smiling witness.

"Well," Moore replied, "an investigation had been made and the results were that no one in the White House was involved. . . . there was no evidence."

RELIEF

After the dramatic charges and denials of John W. Dean III and John N. Mitchell in recent weeks, Moore provided almost Falstaffian relief.

In contrast to the well-rehearsed testimony and controlled manner of Dean, the former White House counsel, and Mitchell, the

former attorney general and Nixon campaign director, Moore often fumbled through the prepared statement he had read Thursday to find answers to the senators' questions and regularly stammered when giving the answers.

But he was, as Sen. Edward J. Gurney noted, one of the few witnesses up to now who had no reported involvement in the Watergate burglary or the subsequent coverup and who clearly had no personal axe to grind. This, according to Gurney, lent credibility to his testimony.

DEAN

And contradicting Dean, who testified that Mr. Nixon had known the truth about the Watergate scandal as early as last September, Moore declared:

"I knew in my heart, if you will, I was totally convinced that the President believed that no one in the White House had been involved and believed right up till he learned differently, I guess, March 21."

Moore repeated that he had met with Mr. Nixon and Dean together four times between March 14 and March 20, and his accounts of the meetings varied little from those given the committee by Dean.

But Moore's interpretation of how much the President knew about the scandal during those meetings differed from Dean's.

DETAILS

Dean told the committee that by March 14 he had already given the President some details of the coverup, including the fact that pay-

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ments were being made to the defendants.

Moore testified that he had no indication that the President had such knowledge during the four meetings.

Following Moore, the committee is scheduled to hear several men who are alleged to have been directly involved in various aspects of the Watergate scandal.

They are Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's former personal lawyer and a key Nixon fund-raiser; Anthony J. Ulasewicz, who is said to have been a courier in transferring hush money to the Watergate defendants; and Robert C. Mardian and Frederick C. LaRue, both key aides to Mitchell.

The hearings are scheduled for five days next week, and it is possible that all four will have a chance to testify.

FRIEND

Moore told the committee that he had known Mr. Nixon since the early 1950s and that he considered himself a personal friend.

Thus, he said, he sought a meeting with the President on April 20 — a few days after the President's speech at which he acknowledged having received "serious charges" about Watergate matters — and advised the President to take the Easter weekend for contemplation of the Watergate situation and to seek outside legal help.

He said that he also urged Mr. Nixon to act quickly, by saying:

"If you don't take action and get the facts quickly, then you will be accused of a coverup of a coverup; and that, sir, will come into this oval office and affect you."

LAWYER

Mr. Nixon did go to Key Biscayne, Fla., that weekend and did meet twice with John J. Wilson, a lawyer who is now serving as attorney for H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, who were once the President's top aides.

It was ten days later — on April 30 — that Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned and that Dean was dismissed.

Moore also recalled for the committee that he had gone to New York last February, at the instruction of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, to see Mitchell and to encourage him to raise money.

Dean contended that the money was intended for the Watergate defendants. Moore said that was not the his understanding. And Mitchell denied any active role in raising money.

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