

Haldeman Kept Close Check On Political Spies: Strachan

By Lawrence Meyer
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White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman kept in close touch with plans by the Nixon re-election committee to gather political intelligence on potential Democratic presidential candidates, former Haldeman aide Gordon C. Strachan testified yesterday.

Haldeman held a series of meetings with Attorney General John N. Mitchell to discuss intelligence-gathering in 1971 and 1972, Strachan told the Senate select Watergate committee.

In April, 1972, Haldeman indicated with a check mark that he had read a memo item about the re-election committee's "sophisticated political intelligence operation," Strachan said. Other Senate testimony has estab-

lished that this operation, designed and directed by G. Gordon Liddy, included plans to burglarize and bug the Democratic National Committee's Watergate headquarters.

Shortly after the Watergate break-in arrests on June 17, 1972, Strachan said Haldeman told him to make sure the White House files were "clean." Taking this statement as a directive, Strachan said, he destroyed the intelligence operation file, related documents and other materials that might be "politically embarrassing" if they became public.

In the course of his day-long testimony, Strachan also provided the committee with a fascinating picture of Haldeman's thorough-going efficiency as the man who presided over the operation of the White House staff.

"Mr. Haldeman had a well-deserved reputation as a very, very tough staff man," Strachan said, "and there were constant pressures to perform well, and I worked very hard."

Strachan told the committee that in April, 1972, Haldeman directed him to contact Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy, then an official of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, "and tell him to transfer whatever capability he had from (Sen. Edmund S.) Muskie to (Sen. George S.) McGovern with particular interest in discovering what the connection between McGovern and Sen. (Edward M.) Kennedy was."

According to testimony at the Watergate trial last January, it was in mid-April, 1972, that Tom Gregory, a

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HEARING, From A1

Brigham Young University student hired by Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. to spy on the Muskie presidential campaign staff, was shifted to the McGovern presidential campaign to provide inside information to Hunt.

Strachan (pronounced "Strawn") also disputed significant portions of former deputy Nixon campaign manager Jeb Stuart Magruder's earlier testimony before the committee.

He did not, however, challenge the testimony of former White House counsel John W. Dean III who testified last month that President Nixon was aware of and participated in the Watergate cover-up. Dean, Strachan said, "had a remarkable facility . . . to remember facts and to keep track of which facts which staff members knew or should be informed about."

Asked by Sen. Joseph M. Montoya (D-New Mexico) if Dean was a "truthful man," Strachan replied, "Well, I don't think he ever lied to me."

"Now," Montoya asked, "would it be your opinion that if John Dean said he had told the President about Watergate and the cover-up, would you say that Dean was telling the truth?"

"Well," Strachan replied, "this is my opinion based on my experience with John Dean, and my opinion would be that John Dean would be telling the truth."

Strachan denied, however, that Magruder had, as the former deputy campaign manager testified, "automatically" sent Strachan copies of the proposals for the Watergate bugging or that Strachan saw wire-tap logs known as the "Gemstone" papers.



By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

Gordon Strachan: "John Dean would be telling the truth."

Giving a strong suggestion that animosity existed between Magruder and himself, Strachan told the committee that since Magruder had admitted committing perjury before the federal Watergate grand jury and during the Watergate trial, Magruder's testimony now could not be trusted. Strachan said that since Magruder faces indictment on multiple counts of perjury for his testimony, his motive "to deliver a member of the White House staff to the prosecutors was quite high." Strachan said that Magruder apparently had chosen to "deliver" Strachan.

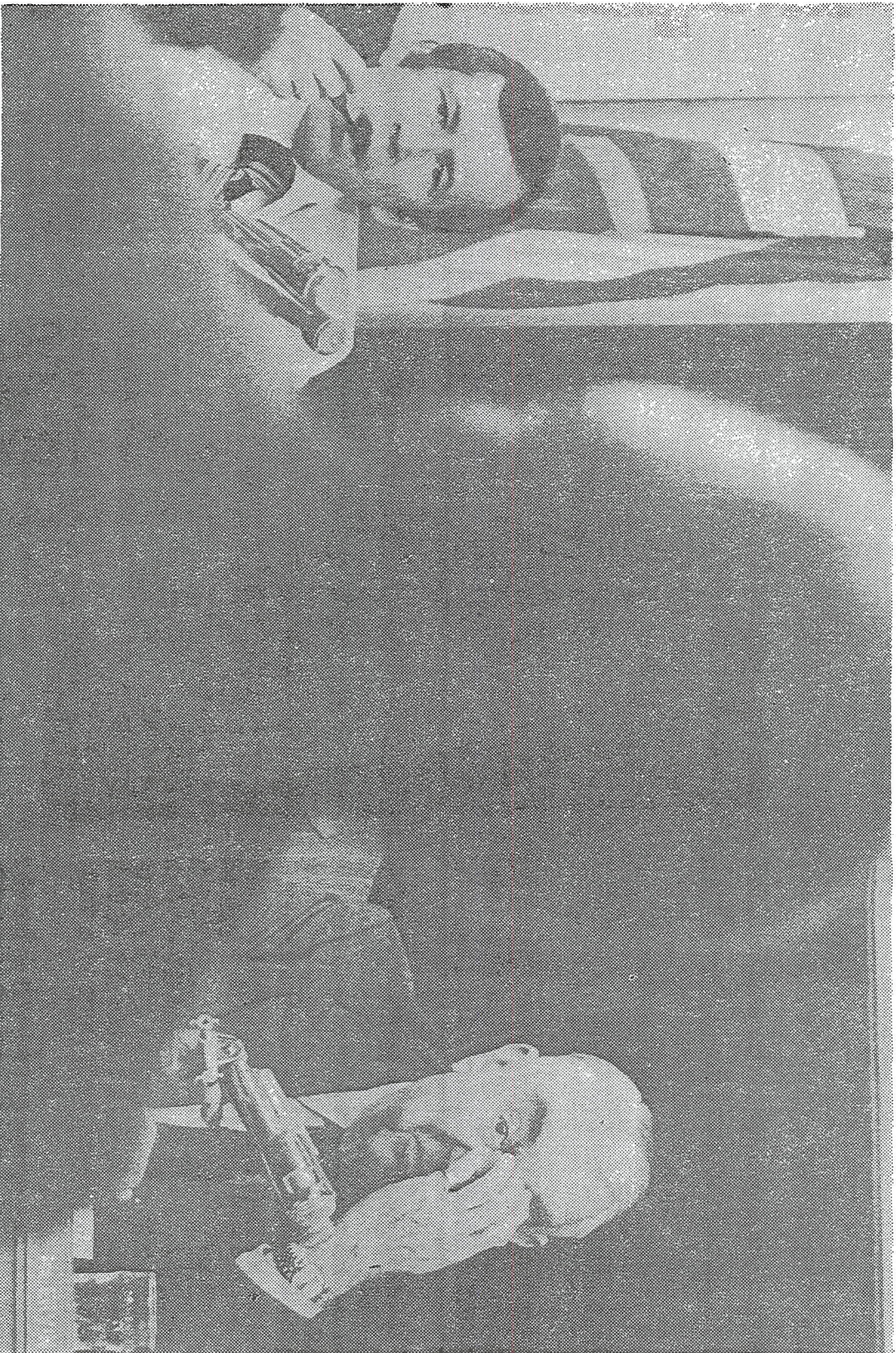
Strachan himself is reported to be one of the targets of the federal Watergate grand jury here. Government sources said this week-end that Strachan was offered an opportunity to plead guilty to one count of obstruction of justice, but that he turned it down and believes he will be found innocent if he is indicted.

In addition to testifying about Dean, Magruder, Haldeman and Mitchell, Strachan also touched on the shadowy role that former special counsel to the President Charles W. Colson played while he was in the White House.

Colson, Strachan told the committee, "emerged, remarkably, from having one staff assistant to having a fairly substantial staff—maybe 20 people. He seemed to be involved in almost every major decision."

"Mr. Colson's office was referred to as the Office of Dirty Tricks," Strachan said. Colson's activities were a "subject of some concern," according to Strachan.

"Every once in a while, Mr. Haldeman would ask me, 'Well, what do you know about what Mr. Colson is



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Sen. Howard Baker, left, and Sen. Sam Ervin seem to have a mild case of the fidgets as Senate Watergate committee continues hearings.

doing?" and I would tell him, 'I am sorry I really don't know very much about what Mr. Colson is doing.'

"And he (Haldeman) would turn to Mr. Higby (Haldeman aide Lawrence Higby) and say, 'Do you know anything about what Mr. Colson was doing?'"

"And it was sort of a joke. Nobody really knew what Mr. Colson was doing," Strachan said. In his own opinion, Strachan said, Haldeman "was certainly aware of Mr. Colson's various dirty tricks, not necessarily the specifics or the details but that he was generally aware of them, and that he (Haldeman) was aware of intelligence gathering since it had been discussed in several meetings."

Among the "dirty tricks" attributed to Colson have been a campaign to attack former U.S. Sen. Joseph D. Tydings (D-Md.) during the 1970 elections, a bogus advertisement published in May, 1972, supporting President Nixon's decision to mine Haiphong harbor, an attempt by Howard Hunt to falsify State Department documents in order to implicate President Kennedy in the assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, and involvement in the drafting of a White House "enemies" list.

Haldeman's interest in political intelligence gathering, according to Strachan, went back at least to June 30, 1971, when Haldeman met with Attorney General Mitchell to discuss the subject.

Strachan said he prepared a "talking paper" for Haldeman for that meeting and that one of its items involved a proposal by White House aide John Caulfield to carry out intelligence activities under the title, "Operation Sandwedge." Strachan said he himself was excluded from the meeting. Other testimony indicated that Caulfield's plan never was adopted in the form in which he presented it.

On Nov. 4, 1971, Haldeman, Mitchell, Magruder

and Strachan met to discuss political intelligence again, Strachan said. Wiretapping was not discussed at this meeting, according to Strachan. Mitchell, Strachan recalled, mentioned G. Gordon Liddy's name but Strachan could not remember details.

According to Strachan, a main item of discussion at that meeting was surveillance of Sen. Kennedy, since Haldeman was "particularly interested in the area of political intelligence and information" about the Massachusetts Democrat.

Haldeman had proposed putting a "24-hour tail" on Kennedy, Strachan said, but "I learned later from John Dean that that had been cut down to periodic. I did not know that Mr. Dean had through Mr. Higby persuaded Mr. Haldeman to rescind that directive." Dean had testified that he thought Kennedy or his aides, ever on the lookout for possible assassins, would have realized he was being followed.

On Dec. 17, 1971, Haldeman and Mitchell met again to discuss political intelligence, according to Strachan. By that time, according to other testimony, the decision had been made to transfer Liddy from the White House to the Nixon re-election committee and to put him in charge of political intelligence.

Strachan said he was excluded from that meeting but he recalled one detail from the "talking paper" that he said he prepared for Haldeman:

"I recall the questions that I posed in the talking paper. One of the questions was, should John Dean become the control point rather than merely the White House contact for political intelligence? The answer that I got from Mr. Haldeman was that he (Dean) should continue to be the White House contact. The other question posed, and (for) which I did not get an answer, should Mr. Liddy be the one man responsible for political intelligence?"

About March 31, 1972,

Strachan said, he received a call from Magruder, who had just returned from a meeting with Mitchell in Key Biscayne. Magruder, Strachan said, told him that the re-election committee now had a "sophisticated political intelligence-gathering operation." Magruder gave no details, according to Strachan.

Strachan said he included that information in a memo to Haldeman a few days later. When Haldeman returned the memo, Strachan said, a check had been placed by that item, indicating that Haldeman had read it.

On April 4, 1972, Mitchell and Haldeman met, Strachan said, and he included the intelligence operation on Haldeman's "talking paper," without really understanding its significance.

Sometime shortly after that meeting in April, Strachan said, Haldeman called him to his office and told him to call Liddy and transfer "whatever capability he had from Muskie to McGovern."

When Liddy came to his office to be given the message, Strachan said, Liddy first "reached over and turned on the radio" before the conversation began. Liddy, a bizarre figure in the Watergate affair, apparently was habitually turning on radios to avoid having his conversations recorded.

Following the arrests of five men inside the Watergate on June 17, 1972, Strachan said he next talked to Haldeman on June 20. Although Strachan said he was "scared to death" and thought he would be "fired at that point" for not having informed Haldeman about the Watergate operation, Haldeman "did not berate me."

"He (Haldeman) said almost jokingly, 'Well, what do we know about the events over the weekend?'" Strachan recalled. "And I was quite nervous and retreated to sort of legal protective terms and I said, 'Well, sir, this is what can

be imputed to you through me, your agent,' and opened the (April) political matters memorandum to the paragraph on intelligence, showed it to him. He acknowledged his check and that he had read that . . . He told me, 'Well, make sure our files are clean.'"

Strachan said he then shredded the political memo, the related "talking papers" and other documents. On July 1, 1972, while on Air Force One, Strachan said he told Haldeman he had "made sure the files were clean." Haldeman, Strachan said, made no response that he could recall.

Strachan said that in shredding the documents, he did not think the contents reflected criminal activity. "I shredded the documents because I had been instructed to do so," Strachan said, "and also because I felt if they ever became public, they would be politically embarrassing."

Strachan also testified that at Dean's direction he had transferred some \$350,000 from a White House fund controlled by Haldeman to re-election committee official Frederick C. LaRue after the election. Although Strachan said he did not know the purposes for which LaRue took the money, LaRue has testified it was used to buy the silence of the Watergate defendants.

Strachan said he later told Haldeman that the money had been transferred to LaRue at Dean's direction. Haldeman, Strachan testified, told him, "Obviously you wouldn't have done it unless you thought Mr. Dean were speaking for me."

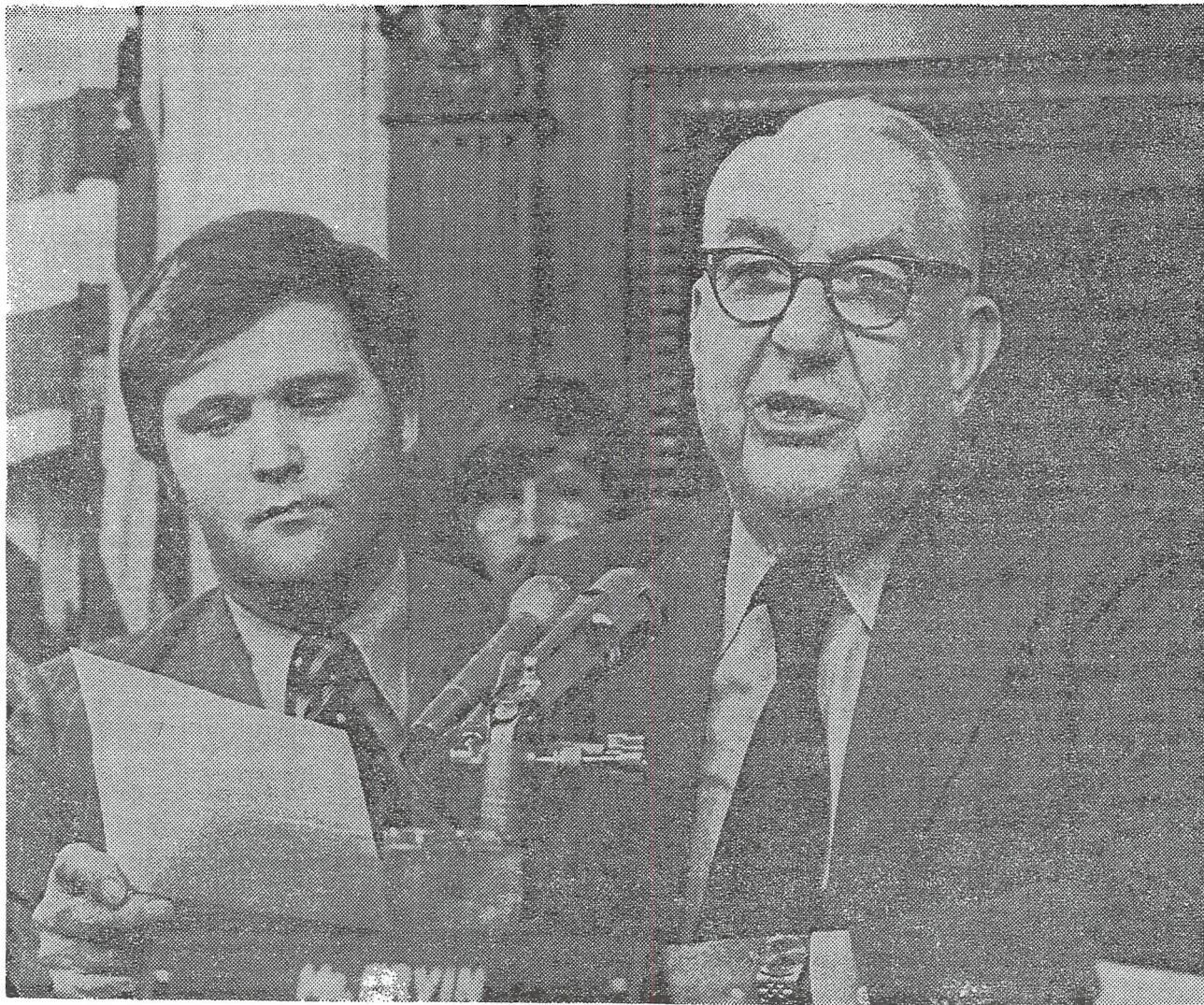
"What did you conclude from that?" chief committee counsel Samuel Dash asked Strachan.

"That I had not taken the money to the wrong person." "And that you weren't in trouble again at all with Mr. Haldeman for doing that?" Dash asked.

"That is correct," Strachan replied.

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A narrow-faced young



By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

Chairman Ervin with Assistant Committee Counsel Rufus Edmisten: "This is a rather remarkable letter . . ."

lawyer who turns 30 today, Strachan came to Washington from the New York law firm where President Nixon and Mitchell once were partners. Yesterday he answered questions clearly, seldom smiling, in a voice that occasionally seemed to quaver slightly.

Woven through his testimony were frequent hints at the sort of relationships he maintained with two of the men, Haldeman and Magruder, with whom he dealt regularly while at the White House and with whom he is now involved in the Watergate affair.

He made no secret of the hostility that now exists between him and Magruder, once his superior at the White House and later his contact at the Committee to Re-elect the President, and told the Senate committee he believes Magruder has sought to make him a scapegoat.

Magruder has agreed to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice, according to federal prosecutors, although he has yet to do so formally in court.

Strachan said that Magruder, "faced with at least 12 counts of perjury," wanted to "deliver a person on the White House staff to the prosecution" in exchange for favorable treatment. "I believe he selected me," Strachan said, in retaliation for his refusal of Magru-

der's request that he corroborate false testimony given by Magruder to a grand jury.

He testified that on March 28 Magruder came to his house carrying a bundle of papers he said were transcripts both of his grand jury testimony and his testimony during the trial of the Watergate burglars. "He was quite distraught," Strachan said.

"He told me the prosecutors were after him on perjury," he went on. "They were not believing him, and he asked me if I would corroborate his part of the story (when Strachan went before the grand jury)."

Strachan said Magruder wanted him to testify that he (Magruder) had wanted to fire Liddy, but that Strachan had intervened in Liddy's behalf. Strachan said he refused to do as Magruder asked.

Magruder has testified that he kept Strachan, to whom he was supposed to report campaign activities, fully informed of Liddy's plans for electronic surveillance of the Democratic National Committee. Strachan vigorously denied Magruder told him anything except that "a sophisticated intelligence-gathering system" had been approved, with a budget of \$300,000.

This information Strachan passed on to Haldeman, in the memo that he said he destroyed on Haldeman's advice after the Watergate break-in.

If Strachan's relationship

with Magruder was difficult and often hostile, with Haldeman it was admiring but demanding, according to his testimony.

Haldeman, he said, had a consuming interest in political intelligence. He also insisted, Strachan said, on personally approving every piece of advertising—his field before he joined the White House staff—sent out by the re-election committee.

Though he admired Haldeman, Strachan said, he was often under intense pressure from him. Once, he recalled, Haldeman telephoned him at home from the President's plane at 4 o'clock in the morning to berate him for not completing some administrative work he had been assigned.

After he hung up the telephone, Strachan said, he thought perhaps the call had been a bad dream—so he called the White House switchboard to confirm that he had received it.

Strachan denied testimony by Dean that he offered to perjure himself when testifying before an investigating federal grand jury last fall to help cover up the White House's Watergate involvement and prevent Haldeman from becoming implicated.

What he had offered to do, he said, was to make an inaccurate public statement about his role in the affair, not to give false testimony while under oath. He said he thought Dean had probably misunderstood him.

Haldeman, he said, advised him to give the grand jury the "absolute truth" when he was called to testify.

Before the committee broke for lunch, Strachan was asked by Sen. Joseph Montoya (D-N. Mex.) what had brought him to Washington, and what advice he might have for other young men like himself considering a career in government.

Strachan said he came to Washington because he found "New York a fascinating place to practice law but a disastrous place to live," and thought Washington would be better.

On the second question, he thought for a moment. "Well, it may sound—It may not be the type of advice you could look back and want to give," he said, "but my advice (for other young men) would be to stay away."

After the election last year, when he began to look for another job, Strachan said he first considered the Internal Revenue Service.

Though recalling that Dean noted in his testimony that there was a feeling in the administration that the IRS should be more politically responsive to "requests," presumably from the White House staff, Strachan said he would have gone to work there not as a White House agent but because he was interested in tax law. Nevertheless, he dropped the idea as "too obviously political."

Eventually, Strachan was named general counsel to the United States Information Agency, a job from which he resigned this spring on the same day that Dean, Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman left their White House posts at the President's request.

Under questioning by Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), yesterday Strachan also said that in U.S. House and Senate races in 1972, support was often withheld by the White House from Republican candidates. Sometimes this was done because their Democratic opponents supported Mr. Nixon on the Vietnam war, Strachan said, and sometimes because the Democrat was backed by organized labor—major elements of which supported the President in 1972.

The decision to withhold campaign funds from Republicans in cases such as these was made at least some of the time by Haldeman, Strachan testified.

Weicker also asked Strachan about a meeting he had earlier this year with Richard Moore, a White House staff member who has testified earlier in the Watergate hearings.

Moore had FBI files in his possession, containing information from interviews Strachan and Dwight Chapin, another White House aide, had given the FBI, Strachan said. He said Moore had obtained the classified FBI material from Dean.

The meeting with Moore, at which Chapin was also present, was held to discuss the case of Donald Segretti, Strachan said. Segretti, a college friend hired by Strachan and Chapin, has been identified by federal investigators as having conducted a campaign of political sabotage against Democratic presidential candidates in 1972. He is now under indictment in Florida for violation of election laws there.

Strachan said he and Chapin had considered Segretti a "punkster" who was supposed to harass the Democrats but not do anything illegal.

Strachan completed his testimony yesterday. The hearings resume today at 10 a.m., when Ehrlichman is scheduled to appear before the committee.



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Counsel Sam Dash has a whisper for Sen. Ervin during testimony by Gordon Strachan.