

White House 'Staged' Testimony About Meetings, Senator Claims

Washington

Senate Watergate committee chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-S.C.) accused the White House yesterday of collaborating with H. R. Haldeman to stage his testimony about a tape recording the committee has sought unsuccessfully from President Nixon to establish what he knew about the Watergate cover-up.

During yesterday's hearings Ervin characterized Haldeman's testimony about the tape recording of a March 21, 1973, White House meeting as "counterfeit evidence" and a calculated leak of Haldeman's version of what the tape shows.

Former White House counsel John W. Dean III has testified that Mr. Nixon indicated at the March 21 meeting that he knew about the coverup. Haldeman testified Monday and yesterday, however, that the tape shows the President was trying to find out about and stop any coverup, although Haldeman's account corroborates most of the details testified to by Dean.

VIEW

Ervin said yesterday that the White House had made only a "powder puff objection" to Haldeman's testifying about the tape recording of the meeting between Mr. Nixon and Dean, a meeting at which Haldeman himself had been present for only part of the time.

"I would say that the clear indication is that the White House's counsel wanted Mr. Haldeman to reveal his interpretation of the tapes to the public," Ervin said.

The extended discussion of

the tape by Ervin and other members of the committee underscored the confidence that President Nixon has reposed in Haldeman.

Haldeman testified that he had been asked twice by President Nixon — once before April 30, while he was still on the White House staff and then again in July — to listen to tapes of presidential conversations and report back to Mr. Nixon on their contents.

KNOWLEDGE

Despite this firm indication that President Nixon, as recently as three weeks ago, entrusted important assignments to Haldeman, the White House former chief of staff sought in his testimony yesterday to minimize the importance of his role in the White House.

Haldeman continually ex-

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pressed a lack of knowledge about the Watergate affair, many policy decisions made in the White House and the Nixon re-election committee, and stated he could not recall details of several meetings in which he participated.

Haldeman said with pride: "I tried to run a tight ship, and I think successfully most of the time. . . . We did throughout the White House

knowledge that through his lawyers he had informed the White House on Sunday of his intention to discuss his knowledge of the tapes President Nixon has refused to turn over to either the Senate committee or to special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox. 29 ✓ 02

OTHERS

In addition, Haldeman revealed that he had several other tapes in his possession although he chose to listen to only two — recordings of the Sept. 15, 1972, and March 21, 1973, Nixon-Dean meetings — saying that he

operation operate on what is known in some views as a zero defect system. We attempted to do everything right."

Haldeman acknowledged

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that he played a major role in overseeing what information went to Mr. Nixon directly, but said he did not play any substantive role in formulation of policy.

"I would not want to imply that I was a part of the policy-making process in terms of substance," Haldeman said in answer to a question. "I was in terms of procedure."

In contrast to the aggressive testimony of his close friend and associate, former presidential domestic advisor John D. Ehrlichman, Haldeman was a soft-spoken, cordial witness, smiling often, occasionally appearing even shy.

Haldeman's gentle manner in responses to even the most hostile questions was in contrast to the otherwise increasingly acrimonious atmosphere of the hearings, with the ranking minority member, Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (Rep-Tenn.), and minority counsel Fred Thompson clashing openly with majority counsel Samuel Dash.

At the same time, Haldeman's lawyer, John Wilson, attacked Dash and argued with Ervin over questions being asked of Haldeman.

Haldeman had told the committee in his opening statement that he had listened to two of the tape recordings of important meetings held between Mr. Nixon and White House Counsel Dean, during which the Watergate affair was discussed?

Under further questioning yesterday, Haldeman ac-

thought it improper to listen to tapes of the other meetings, in which he had not participated.

He testified he was present at all of the September 15 meeting and 40 minutes of the March 21 meeting.

Haldeman also revealed that three weeks ago, around July 10 or 12, he had kept several of the tapes, for two nights in a closet in his home and that the tapes were left there unguarded while Haldeman was away from the house.

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Haldeman's Tape Evidence Counterfeit, Ervin Asserts