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Report Seen In Fall on Watergate

By Peter Jay

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The Senate select Watergate committee may release an interim report on its investigations early this fall before completing its full three-phase hearing schedule, Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.) said yesterday.

Committee staff sources confirmed that there has been informal discussion of such a report, which would cover only the current hearings on the Watergate burglary and subsequent efforts to conceal the involvement in the break-in of White House and 1972 Nixon campaign officials. But no definite decision has been reached, the sources said.

The committee's original plan was to complete all three phases of its investigation — Watergate, campaign sabotage ("dirty tricks") and campaign financing — before releasing a final report.

The congressional resolution establishing the committee says that a final report must be completed by Feb. 28, 1974, and that interim reports may be made if the committee wishes.

Samuel Dash, the committee's chief majority (Democratic) counsel, said the question of an interim report has not yet been on the committee's agenda. He said it will probably be considered at the committee's next executive session, in September after the congressional recess.

Any recommendations contained in an interim report would be tentative only, Dash said. If such a report were made on the first phase of the hearings, he said, it would probably not be completed before October.

Talmadge made his suggestion that the committee "perhaps can file an interim report" in an interview on the CBS television program "Face the Nation" (WTOP).

The Georgia Democrat also reiterated the committee's request that the President release secret tapes of private conversations he had, both in the White

House and on the telephone, with various persons connected with the Watergate affair.

"I don't think the tape issue will ever be laid to rest until they're made public," Talmadge said. Release of the tapes would be "in the interest of the President personally, in the interest of the office, in the interest of the economy and in the interest of the country," he said.

He also said he thought Mr. Nixon should appear for questioning in some public forum, either before the committee or at a news conference.

Talmadge said Watergate committee chairman Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) has named him head of a subcommittee to investigate Republican charges that committee chief investigator Carmine Bellino, working for the Democrats, illegally bugged Mr. Nixon's presidential campaign organization in 1960.

"If it's true, Mr. Bellino ought not to be retained on the committee staff," Talmadge said. The other members of his subcommittee are Sens. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.).

Talmadge said the mail he has received on the Watergate issue runs the gamut from demands that the President be impeached to declarations that the hearings should be immediately suspended. Most of those who write him want to see the hearings continue, he said.

Asked if he thought Mr. Nixon has been "mortally wounded" by the Watergate scandal, Talmadge cited the President's slippage in the polls in recent months and said he "wouldn't call that a mortal wound. I would call it a substantial decrease in popularity."

The Gallup poll reported last month that the number of people who generally support Mr. Nixon's performance in the presidency has dropped from 68 to 40 per cent. The Harris poll shows a similar though slightly less precipitous decline in support for the President.

The Watergate hearings, which Talmadge described yesterday as alternately "interesting, fascinating, burdensome and boresome," will resume on Monday with the cross-examination of former acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III.

Gray will be followed by Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Peterson and former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindiest. The committee expects to finish its questioning of these witnesses by the middle of this week, and then will break for the congressional recess lasting into September.