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Senators Plan to Shorten New Watergate Hearings

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 9—The Senate Watergate committee, apparently frustrated in its cross-country search for fresh revelations about 1972 campaign sabotage, intends to abbreviate its hearings when they resume later this month.

But a majority of the seven-member Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities has decided against splitting the panel into two subcommittees and is opposed to a suggested ban on television coverage of the hearings.

Meanwhile, the struggle between President Nixon and the Watergate grand jury over the White House tape recordings moves tomorrow to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, an uncertain battleground because the court is neither as liberal nor as predictable as popularly supposed.

The Senators will meet Tuesday, for the first time since the hearings recessed Aug. 7, to set up the ground rules for public sessions that will attempt to tie up loose ends in the investigation of the Watergate break-in and then examine political "dirty tricks" and campaign financing.

Authoritative sources of the committee said that a five-member team of investigators, which spent the August recess interviewing more than 25 individuals who either enlisted or refused to join in sabotage against Democratic Presidential contenders last year, had uncovered some new leads but little additional hard evidence.

The officials said that Terry F. Lenzner, the assistant Democratic counsel who headed the investigation team, had re-

Continued on Page 25, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

ported that the Senators would "circumstantial evidence" suggesting a widespread White House effort to influence the press. But Mr. Lenzner was said to have informed his superiors that much of the information merely confirmed reports already published by the press.

According to officials, most of the committee's resources have been directed at unearthing details of questionable financing practices in the Committee for the Re-election of the

President and, to a lesser extent, among Democrats who sought election to the White House last year.

"That's the area where we're making the most progress," one staff member said in an interview a few days ago.

The official said that David H. Dorsen, the assistant Democratic counsel in charge of the campaign finance inquiry, had assembled information that would "show a pattern of use of Government instrumentalities to pressure people and companies into making campaign contributions."

However, the sources said that much of the information was repetitive and could probably be presented without calling all the available witnesses.

If the Senators approve the tentative outline of the committee staff, the hearings will include a week or so of finishing up details of the Watergate break-in and cover-up, about two weeks on campaign sabotage and three weeks on campaign finances.

Target Date

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., the North Carolina Democrat who is the committee chairman, has set Nov. 1 as the target date for completing the public hearings. The resolution that created the Senate committee calls for a final report on all three phases of the investigation by next February.

The White House and a number of key Republicans, including members of the committee, have been calling for an early end to the hearings.

Furthermore, Senator Herman E. Talmadge of Georgia, the second-ranking Democrat on the panel, urged his colleagues last month to consider whether the investigation could be speeded up by conducting the sabotage and financing hearings simultaneously.

Despite persistent reports that the committee was inclined to split into subcommittees, a survey of the Senators in the last few days showed little support for the idea.

Amount of Evidence

Senator Talmadge said that he abandoned it himself after being advised by the senior staff members that they did not believe they could develop enough information to sustain simultaneous hearings.

"We can't hold joint hearings without productive evidence," Senator Talmadge said.

Colleagues reported that Senators Ervin and Daniel K. Inouye, Democrat of Hawaii, were also opposed to splitting the committee, and Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Repub-

lican of Connecticut, said in an interview that it would be too difficult for the Senators to keep track of both subjects at the same time.

Senator Joseph M. Montoya, Democrat of New Mexico, said that he had no strong feelings on the issue but that his constituents "want the hearings continued." He is expected to support whatever position Senator Ervin takes.

The Republican vice chairman, Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., interviewed by telephone at his Tennessee law office, said that splitting the committee was only one of several ways the hearings might be ended soon. Witnesses whose testimony would be repetitious could submit affidavits to the committee or give depositions to the staff, he said.

The panel member most eager to cut short the investigation is Senator Edward J. Gurney, Republican of Florida, who urged an Oct. 15 termination at the latest.

Total Overkills

"I've never felt so strong about anything in my life [that] continued dramatizing of this thing is total overkill and it is paralyzing the country," Mr. Gurney told an interviewer. "The country needs to be directed to other priorities. You don't need another day of hearings to develop legislation."

At least part of the current impetus for abbreviated hearings is attributed by the Senators and others to concern that the public will conclude that the inquiry is a prolonged effort to discredit the President.

Senator Weicker said bluntly that his interrogation of future witnesses would be governed by two considerations: "What does it do to the image and credibility of the committee? Is the testimony of equal or greater importance than what has come before?"

He said that it would be "a tragedy if people had second thoughts and come to believe that it was all a political exercise." Furthermore, Mr. Weicker told one interviewer that the public did not need additional examples "to convince them that this bunch in the Administration had politics down in the gutter."

Senator Robert J. Dole of Kansas, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee, said last week that he was considering asking the Senate to bar television coverage of the hearings when they resume.