

No Undue Haste

With the Senate's Watergate Committee hearings due to resume next week, there are pressures on the committee to speed up its work in order to conclude the hearings by Nov. 1. Much of this clamor is partisan and self-serving. Senator Robert Dole, the former chairman of the Republican National Committee, has introduced a resolution calling upon the committee to bar television cameras. Since Senator Dole faces a hard fight for reelection in Kansas next year and the Watergate hearings do not generate helpful publicity for his campaign, his eagerness to get the hearings off camera is readily understandable.

There is also a feeling among some members of the general public that the hearings are negative and divisive, but complaints along this line are unimpressive. An appropriate analogy is with the person who has a chest problem and wants his doctor to tell him he has a heavy cold rather than tuberculosis; similarly, many people would prefer not to hear about corruption and lawlessness in their government. Good news is always more welcome than bad news.

President Nixon hinted at the same theme in his radio address yesterday when he urged Congress to concentrate now on his legislative programs, hinting that "precious time" had been lost due to Watergate. The specific merits of his programs to cope with inflation, the energy shortage and other matters can better be commented upon once his full message is sent to Congress today. But as far as the Watergate hearings are concerned, two points may be made. The record of this Congress to date clearly shows that as many bills have been considered and voted upon as in the past sessions. Whatever slackening of effort and attention Watergate has caused have occurred in the Executive branch. Secondly, Watergate is an important part of "the business of the people," going far beyond the notorious act of the break-in to the corruption of the American political process itself.

When the Senate Watergate Committee meets tomorrow to decide the schedule of further hearings, Senator Ervin and his colleagues have a responsibility to base their plans solely upon the amount of work to be done. Nov. 1 or any other terminal date is purely arbitrary. These seven Senators have as grave a duty to discharge as any Congressional committee in the history of the Republic. They must discharge it thoroughly, deliberately, and with the most careful preparation. Instead of resorting to greater haste, the committee would do better to return to its original schedule of three hearing days a week rather than maintain the hectic Monday-through-Friday routine that was later adopted.

If the committee needs more time to await the Supreme Court's decision on its request for the White House tapes, it should delay its final hearings until that decision has been made. There have been enough cover-ups and slovenly pseudo-investigations. Disregarding all external pressures, the Senate Watergate Committee must not abandon its task until all the facts are known.