

Senators Cut Back Watergate Hearings

18 More
Public
Sessions

Washington

The Senate Watergate committee decided yesterday on a schedule of hearings that will sharply curtail its public inquiry into 1972 presidential campaign sabotage and financing.

The Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities agreed, at a 75-minute closed meeting, to delay resumption of its Watergate hearings until September 24, to limit the sessions to three days a week, and to aim at a November 1 target date for completion of the investigation.

This means 18 more days of hearings.

In announcing the schedule, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. of North Carolina, the Democratic chairman, and Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the ranking Republican, rejected suggestions that the committee was responding to pressure from the White House and Republican party leaders to terminate the hearings and turn over the Watergate matter to the courts.

WITNESSES

Ervin told reporters that the seven senators believed they could expedite the hearings by focusing on "key witnesses" and "salient points" of testimony without going into "such detail that we won't be able to see the forest for the bushes and the trees."

Baker said no consideration had been given to the political overtones of the investigation.

"The committee, as a

committee, is determined to finish this thing promptly and thoroughly," Baker said. "And I think we are going to do just that. That happens to coincide with what I think the public wants, that is, to continue but to continue with as much dispatch as possible."

The schedule adopted yes-

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terday will mean the panel, which spent 37 days looking into the Watergate break-in and coverup before recessing the first phase of the hearings on August 7, will have 18 hearing days to complete that phase and then examine witnesses on political "dirty tricks (the second phase) and campaign contributions (phase three).

Asked how the committee could expect to do a thorough job so quickly, Ervin said that "you could carry this on forever, you know, until the last lingering echo of Gabriel's horn trembled into ultimate silence, if you want to go into all the campaign contributions."

He said that the senators saw their function in the latter two phases of the inquiry as one of trying "to reveal the broad outlines" of what its investigators uncovered.

REPORTS

The hearings had been scheduled tentatively to resume next week. There were reports from authoritative members of the committee staff that its investigators had been stymied in a cross-country search for new revelations about campaign sabotage attempts.

Ervin, responding to a question about the reports, said that he had not heard of them. But he and Baker said that the committee investi-

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gators had indicated they would welcome an additional week to gather information.

Ervin attributed the delay in the resumption of hearings to the need for "some more investigation." Baker added that there was "a lot of traveling involved" in the inquiry and said that, furthermore, "it covers a wide variety of information far beyond the scope of a single event, as was the case in phase one" of the hearings.

Three committee investigators went to New Hampshire yesterday to interview 20 potential witnesses about "dirty tricks" alleged to have occurred in that state's 1972 presidential primary. Other staff members were said to be checking records of the Key Biscayne (Fla.) Bank and Trust Co., which is operated by President Nixon's close friend, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo.

TAPES

Ervin and Baker declared that they remained determined to obtain access to White House tape recordings that President Nixon has refused to turn over to the committee, to Archibald Cox, the special Watergate prosecutor, or to the federal courts.

Ervin said the tapes are

"crucial to the development of the full truth" about Watergate because the tapes "in an unaltered state" would determine the validity of testimony by John W. Dean, III, the former White House Counsel, that Mr. Nixon had been a participant in the Watergate coverup.

Baker said the committee would write a report for the Senate by February 28 whether it gained access to the tapes or not. But he added that the tapes represented the "first and best evidence of certain critical encounters" and, as such, would "greatly enhance" the panel's efforts to define the facts in the scandal.

TELEVISION

There had been some question whether the committee, pressed by two Republican senators, Barry Goldwater of Arizona and Robert Dole of Kansas, to bar television cameras from the hearing room, would resume without a national television audience.

But Baker said that while he was "in sympathy" with the attitude of his Republican colleagues he was not in favor of their proposal.

A spokesman for NBC said later in New York that the network intends to televise live segments of the hearings, based on daily determinations of the likely significance of the testimony. Officials of ABC and CBS said they have not decided what form their coverage of the hearings would take.

New York Times