

# Panel May Trim Hearings

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The Senate select Watergate committee, disappointed by the first day of its inquiry into political "dirty tricks," now is considering ending its hearings even before the present tentative deadline of Nov. 1.

Committee sources said yesterday that a mood of disillusionment has set in among both senators and the staff since the testimony Wednesday of White House aide Patrick J. Buchanan.

The Democratic members and staff in particular were said to be considering the idea of an early adjournment.

Buchanan, in the view of some committee staff members, was a disastrous witness for the beginning of the inquiry into alleged sabotage in the 1972 presidential campaign. "I don't know anyone who's pleased" with the way Buchanan was handled by the committee, one source said.

A Republican staff member, however, said he

thought Buchanan, who admitted doing nothing "illicit, unethical, improper or unprecedented" during the campaign, was a very useful witness for the beleaguered Nixon administration.

The committee next expects to call former White House aide Dwight Chapin and his friend from college, the clandestine Republican campaign operative Donald Segretti, as witnesses when the hearings resume next Tuesday. Chapin, 32, who re-

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cruited Segretti, also 32, will probably be called first, committee sources said. A staff meeting is scheduled for Saturday to work out details.

Segretti is under indictment in Florida and here in Washington on charges of illegal political sabotage. The special Watergate prosecutor's office here recently announced that Segretti has agreed to cooperate with the

government and is expected to plead guilty on Oct. 1.

Staff members said that there is now some doubt if the committee will even go on to the projected third phase of the hearings—an inquiry into alleged irregularities in the financing of the 1972 campaign.

There has been less preparation for that phase on the part of the committee than for the first two stages, the Watergate burglary and related events and campaign

sabotage generally, one source observed.

But committee counsel Rufus Edmisten, Dash's deputy, disagreed. "There are plenty of cold, hard facts to be brought out about campaign contributions," Edmisten said.

There was a certain amount of backstage finger-pointing on the committee staff yesterday as post-mortems were conducted on the Buchanan testimony, with chief Democratic counsel Sam Dash and assistant

counsel Terry Lenzner receiving much of the blame.

"Lenzner wanted to put Buchanan on and he talked Sam into it," one source said. Another source agreed, but noted that "Lenzner wants everyone put on."

Republican counsel Fred Thompson and committee vice chairman Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) "must have been gloating all the way to (the restaurant) Sans Souci" after Buchanan testified, this source said. "They got what they wanted."

One Democratic senator was quoted by an aide as declaring the session with Buchanan "a real blow-out and an unmitigated disaster. He made us look like a bunch of fools."

Part of the problem, one source suggested, was that tough political campaign activities engaged in and suggested by Buchanan outraged chief counsel Dash, but seemed ordinary to the experienced campaigners on the committee.

"Sam thought things like

interfering with the other party's primary were really horrendous," a Democratic source said. "But in politics you always try to get the weakest man nominated by the other side. That's as natural as the sun rising."

Buchanan told the committee that it was White House strategy in 1972 to undercut the campaign of Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) in the hope that Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.)—who was believed to be a more vulnerable candidate

against Mr. Nixon—would win the Democratic nomination.

Sen. Joseph M. Montoya (D-N.Mex.) said he didn't believe the decision by the networks to drop daily live television coverage of the hearings would be a factor in deciding how long the committee would continue.

Staff members, however, said that the loss of the gavel-to-gavel live coverage that the committee has had since the hearings began last May could not help but

encourage the prompt conclusion of its public work.

"The sooner they finish, the sooner we can begin the report," one aide said. The committee's final report is due in February.

At least some members of the committee staff, however, took the view that the Buchanan testimony was an aberration and that future witnesses will provide new and useful facts.

Segretti and Chapin have been scheduled by the committee for some time. Also expected to testify during the "dirty tricks" phase of the hearings is former New York policeman and White House security assistant John J. Caulfield.

Former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson might also be called, committee sources said, if his current legal problems are resolved. Colson's lawyer has told the committee Colson cannot testify now because he is the target of a grand jury investigation here.

Another witness who may be called is John J. Ragan, a former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and former security chief of the Republican National Committee. According to testimony before the committee, Ragan and Caulfield once tapped the telephone of columnist Joseph Kraft. Ragan has denied doing so.

Kenneth Khachigian, Buchanan's assistant, was considered as a possible witness but is now unlikely to be called, committee sources said.

Republican committee members and staff, notably Baker and Thompson, are known to want to call some witnesses of their own—perhaps to demonstrate that "dirty tricks" in political campaigns are indulged in by Democrats as well as Republicans.

Some sources said, however, that Baker and Thompson have had difficulty finding examples of illegal or unethical Democratic campaign practices in the last presidential campaign.

In another development yesterday, Chief Justice of the United States Warren E. Burger denied a petition by a group supporting President Nixon who asked that the Watergate hearings be halted immediately.

The group, the National Citizens Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, made the request initially in U.S. District Court here. Burger refused, without comment, to stop the hearings pending an appeal of the lower court's decision.