

Congressmen Shocked By Tape Development

By Sen. Frank Church and Sen. Alan Cranston
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Congressmen reacted with shock and dismay yesterday to the announcement that two of the Watergate tapes didn't exist.

Both Republicans and Democrats said they expect the public to be skeptical. On top of recent events, they said, the announcement that the tapes don't exist further damage the credibility of the President. Democrats renewed their calls for impeachment proceedings and the appointment of a special Watergate prosecutor independent of the executive branch.

Some Republicans expressed the hope that judgment would be withheld or said that if Judge John A. Sirica accepted the White House explanation of why the tapes didn't exist, the public would be misled. Others wondered aloud why the White House didn't announce that the tapes didn't exist some time ago. All admitted that the incident would hurt the President.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) said simply, "It's the living end."

Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Wyo.) said, "This hurts him. It further hurts the matter of credibility in government because many, many people will be very skeptical."

Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) said, "Surely the President and his counsel must have known the situation on these tapes during all the discussions with the court and with the Senate committee. This doesn't have the character of a recent discovery. The public is fed up with his sort of business."

Members of the Senate Republican Policy Committee met yesterday before the announcement about the

tapes to voice their concern over the President's loss of credibility and diminishing support on Capitol Hill. After the announcement their concern increased.

Among the mildest reactions was Sen. Clifford Hansen (R-Wyo.). "I wouldn't think that it would be helpful to him (the President). I should think the public and everyone would want an explanation, but since I haven't heard what the White House will say by way of explanation, I don't think I should make further comment."

Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.) and Sen. Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.) said the news that the tapes could not be produced gives even more strength to the argument for a special prosecutor independent of the executive branch.

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) called for a thorough probe of the question of "why, during the long controversy over the tapes, did the White House not indicate at the outset that two of the most important tapes did not exist?"

In the House, where a preliminary inquiry of impeachment proceedings is about to get under way, Democrats called for an intensifying or speeding up of the process.

"I just think it's unbelievable," Rep. Brock Adams (D-Wash.) said. "It really leads me to a strong belief that we must proceed with the impeachment inquiry."

Rep. Bill Alexander (D-Ark.) said, "I wasn't surprised the tapes were missing in view of the events of the past six months. There are no surprises left in this administration. I was hopeful the tapes would produce either vindication of the President or corroboration of the Dean testimony and that we might then end the

matter. But now I think it's up to the House to conduct an independent investigation of all allegations that might tend to go to the question of impeachment."

Rep. John Moss (D-Calif.) said, "Coincidences, coincidences, coincidences. It may be true, but it is remarkable that one even has to guess how a President's statement?"

Rep. Philip L. Burton (D-Mich.) said, "It has to depend on whether Judge Sirica is willing to accept the explanation. If he refuses to accept the explanation, the whole question of the President's credibility comes back again. If he accepts it, that should cut the damage and be the end of it."

Rep. John Anderson (R-Ill.) the chairman of the House Republican Conference, said, "My deepest concern is with the credibility of the White House reduced to a minimum level. The American public might not accept this explanation. The upshot of that is that it will further ravish his credibility and harden any cynicism and disbelief now prevalent."