

Claim Disputed

President Says Cox Reneged On Tapes Deal

Washington

President Nixon reportedly accused Archibald Cox yesterday of having reneged at the last minute on a compromise settlement of the Watergate tapes case.

But the President's account of events that led to his dismissal of the Watergate special prosecutor last month was challenged by Cox and apparently contradicted by published records of the unsuccessful effort to resolve the tapes controversy out of court.

According to Representative Charles W. Whalen Jr. (Rep-Ohio), who took notes on Mr. Nixon's eighth and final Watergate meeting with members of Congress yesterday, the President gave the following explanation for ordering Cox's dismissal on Saturday, October 20:

"Cox changed his mind on Friday night (October 19) because of lack of confidence in Senator Stennis. We did not know until Saturday he had changed his mind."

Senator John C. Stennis (Dem-Miss.) had been chosen by the President to authenticate a White House summary of the contents of nine tape recordings that were being sought by the Watergate grand jury and the Senate Watergate committee. The planned compromise collapsed when Cox refused to accept it and was dismissed and Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson resigned and deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus was dismissed rather than carry out the President's order to dismiss Cox.

DENIAL

Cox, reached yesterday by telephone in Brooksville, Me., said that he had "never questioned Senator Stennis's integrity at all." His objections to the compromise plan, Cox said, were spelled out in a memorandum to Richardson and a letter to Charles Alan Wright, the special White House counsel on the tapes case.

Both documents, along with a letter from Wright to Cox, were made public by the former special prosecutor a few hours before his dismissal on October 20, the date that Mr. Nixon reportedly said the White House first learned of Cox's objections.

The memo to Richardson was dated October 18.

Cox said yesterday that it had been delivered to the Attorney General's office at mid-afternoon that Thursday. The memo cited 11 "highly important" points about the compromise plan.

SCOPE

Among the points were objections that "the narrow scope of the proposal is a grave defect" — it would have not have assured Cox's access to other White House tapes and documents — and that it might be difficult for "any one man operating in secrecy, consulting only with the White House" to generate public confidence in the authenticity of the tapes summary.

Cox's letter to Wright was dated Friday, October 19, and delivered, Cox said yesterday, to the White House by mid-morning.

It objected that the tapes themselves apparently would be withheld "even if it meant dismissal of prosecutions against former government officials who have betrayed the public trust."

The October 19 letter to Wright also complained that Cox's efforts to obtain other White House tapes or documents "bearing upon criminal wrongdoing" would be left to the discretion of the White House.

That same Friday, Wright replied in a letter to Cox that "the differences between us remain so great that no purpose would be served by further discussion" of the compromise offer.

The president, who traveled yesterday afternoon to Florida to prepare for a four-day round of public appearances in the south, was hailed by some of the 28 House Republicans who met with him yesterday morning over fish, eggs and bacon.

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