

Richardson Lied, Nixon Is Quoted

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Republican senators, furnishing new details yesterday on President Nixon's charge that Elliot L. Richardson was untruthful about why he quit as Attorney General, quoted the President as saying, "He was not telling the truth. I have not said this publicly because I did not want to hurt him."

Senators said the President challenged Richardson's veracity at meetings with GOP senators Tuesday and Wednesday nights to discuss the Watergate case and a variety of other charges against Mr. Nixon.

Richardson resigned as Attorney General because Mr. Nixon had decided to fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. Richardson said he disagreed with the President's order that Cox quit using the courts to obtain Watergate information the President considered privileged.

It was Richardson's position on Cox's use of the courts that was challenged most sharply by the President and White House staff chief Alexander M. Haig Jr., according to senators present at the Tuesday or Wednesday meetings.

They quoted the President and Haig as saying flatly that Richardson had agreed to the order to fire Cox, and only began saying he hadn't assented to it after he quit.

Senators present Wednesday said Haig had hinted that the reason Richardson had changed his story was that he wanted to glamorize himself to run for governor of Massachusetts. They said Mr. Nixon cut in facetiously, "And in Massachusetts, it will probably help him." Massachusetts was the only state Mr. Nixon lost in 1972.

Senators also said Haig had made a reference to drinking by Richardson, which at least one senator took to be a nasty crack directed to drunken driving charges leveled against Richardson years ago.

The presidential charges

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against Richardson were made in exchanges between Mr. Nixon and Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.) Tuesday night and between Mr. Nixon, Haig and Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr. (R-Md.) Wednesday night.

On Tuesday night, according to senators present, Brooke challenged the President when Mr. Nixon asserted that during the week prior to the Cox firing and Richardson resignation, Richardson had stood squarely with the President on the proposed Watergate tape compromise that Cox eventually rejected.

Under the compromise, summaries of the Watergate tapes, verified for accuracy by Sen. John C. Stennis (D-Miss.), were to be made available to the Senate Watergate committee, and to Judge John J. Sirica for eventual use by Cox as special prosecutor. In addition, Cox was to cease seeking further tapes or other materials through lawsuits against the White House.

Brooke reportedly told the President Richardson hadn't agreed to the prohibition against Cox using the courts to obtain added evidence.

"I know this because he spoke to me on the phone at the time and told me so," said Brooke, a close friend and associate of Richardson.

"No, he agreed to the compromise and the prohibition," the President reportedly said, contradicting Brooke. Mr. Nixon then reportedly added, "He was not telling the truth. I have not said this publicly because I did not want to hurt him."

Brooke, when asked yesterday whether this was an accurate rendering of the Tuesday exchange, said, "It's the truth."

Senators quoted Haig as saying on Wednesday that it was actually Richardson's idea to order Cox not to use the courts to seek new presidential documents.

"This is a clear contradiction of Richardson's sworn testimony," shot out Mathias, a close friend of Richardson.

"Elliot did not tell the truth," Mr. Nixon is reported to have responded. Haig said, "I have read Elliot's testimony and it is not true."

At this point, according to

one senator, President Nixon intervened in a joking tone, "Well, who's going to get him on perjury?"

Mathias also reportedly disputed a Haig statement suggesting that Richardson hadn't threatened to resign over the Cox firing until the last minute.

Haig reportedly finally agreed that Richardson had made such a threat on Monday night before Cox was fired, but said he didn't take it as a serious threat at that time.

Haig is quoted as saying Richardson, in apologizing for a charge he had made of "shabby treatment" by Haig, had told Haig, "I'd had a drink and I was tired" when the statement was made.

One senator took this as a deliberate attempt to revive memories of a 1939 drunken driving conviction which Richardson suffered when he was 18, and a 1951 traffic charge in which Richardson, although not charged with drunken driving, admitted he'd had a few drinks.

Mathias, asked about the portions of the Wednesday night discussion involving him and Haig's remarks, said, "That is substantially correct."

Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), who was present Tuesday, said, "The President clearly gave the impression that Richardson wasn't accurate."

Dole said the White House had told him the day Richardson resigned, "It's okay—Richardson is on board," with regard to supporting the order to Cox against using legal procedures to get new White House materials.