

Watergate Panel

By John Hanrahan

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A Senate subcommittee divided along partisan lines has cleared Carmine S. Bellino, chief investigator for the Senate select Watergate committee, of charges by Republican officials that he participated in plans to electronically eavesdrop on Richard M. Nixon during the 1960 presidential campaign.

Sens. Heman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.) and Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), the Democratic majority on the three-member subcommittee of the Senate Watergate committee, concluded in a report released by Committee Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.):

"... that there is no direct, competent or credible evidence to sustain the

charges against Bellino that he participated in electronic eavesdropping or in the planning of electronic eavesdropping" against Mr. Nixon in 1960.

The majority report also concluded that there is "no basis for discharging Mr. Bellino," who is a veteran congressional investigator.

The third member of the subcommittee, Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.), said in a minority report that he agreed with the majority that "there is no direct evidence to sustain the charges of electronic surveillance by Bellino."

Gurney nevertheless expressed strong criticism of Bellino. He said there is "some credible evidence of contemplated electronic surveillance, although there is much conflicting testimo-



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Carmine S. Bellino, chief Watergate investigator.

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ny." Gurney also criticized Bellino's acknowledgement that he conducted personal surveillance of some persons in connection with his presidential campaign duties for then-Sen. John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Ervin said he concurred in the subcommittee's majority report and that he was "constrained to say that if the charge against Mr. Bellino had been made in a court of law, the court would have had to reject the charge on the ground that there was not a scintilla of competent or credible evidence to sustain it."

Ervin called Bellino "a faithful public servant of exemplary character."

The controversy over Bellino surfaced last July when Republican National Committee Chairman George Bush released two affidavits that he said raised "very serious questions about" Bellino's conduct in the 1960 campaign.

Bush said the affidavits indicated Bellino may have been involved in a plan to bug hotel space occupied by then-Vice President Nixon in preparation for his televised debates with Mr. Kennedy. Bush and 22 Republican senators called for a Senate investigation, and Ervin appointed a subcommittee to do the job.

One of the affidavits against Bellino came from private investigator John Wolf Leon, who died two weeks before Bush released his affidavit, and the other came from Joseph W. Shimon, a private investigator and former District of Columbia policeman.

Leon alleged, according to

the subcommittee report, that on the morning following one of the Kennedy-Nixon televised debates, Oliver W. Angelone, an associate of Bellino, remarked in a reference to Kennedy campaign worker Edward Murray Jones, that "Jonesy really did his job well this time."

The subcommittee said Leon said he was "confident that Ed Jones and Oliver Angelone successfully bugged the Nixon space or taped his phones prior to the television debate."

Leon also said Jones had said he had "several good wiretaps going for Bellino," including ones on three ministers suspected of distributing anti-Catholic literature directed against Mr. Kennedy in the 1960 campaign.

Shimon, in sworn testimony before the subcommittee, said that Angelone approached him in 1960 with a plan to install eavesdropping devices in space to be occupied by Republican campaigners in the Wardman Park (now Sheraton Park) Hotel, but that Shimon declined to become a member of the alleged bugging team. Shimon said Angelone told him he was working for Bellino, the subcommittee report said.

Jones, Angelone and Bellino all denied any knowledge of any 1960 bugging plan to the subcommittee. Bellino acknowledged that he may have used Jones once for personal surveillance of former Republican Rep. O. K. Armstrong who had organized a meeting of ministers at which anti-

Catholic literature was to be distributed.

Bellino said he was attempting to determine if Armstrong was in contact with Republican leaders before the meeting. Bellino denied ever engaging in any bugging in the 1960 campaign.

In all, the subcommittee said it interviewed more than 25 witnesses over a 2½-month period, including former Republican and Democratic officials active in the 1960 campaign who said they had no indication that there was ever any bugging directed against Mr. Nixon or anyone else in that campaign.

Not mentioned in the report is the information from sources on the Senate committee staff that one of the persons who helped the Republican National Committee in obtaining the allegations against Bellino was John (Fat Jack) Buckley, a former Office of Economic Opportunity official.

During the Watergate hearings, Buckley acknowledged that while employed at OEO he had received documents photographed by a spy in the presidential campaign of Sen. Edmund Muskie (D-Maine) in 1972, and had passed them on to the Nixon campaign through E. Howard Hunt Jr., later to be one of the Watergate conspirators.

Several Democratic sources on the Senate Watergate committee, who did not wish to be named, have charged that the Republicans initiated the investigation of Bellino to hamper his effectiveness as a committee investigator.