

Stennis Denies Approving Final Tapes Compromise

Washington

Senator John C. Stennis (Dem-Miss.) said yesterday that he had never agreed to the final White House version of the proposed Watergate tapes compromise that figured in the firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Stennis said in a telephone interview he "had no idea that the White House wanted him to authenticate a tran-

script of the subpoenaed tapes, to be given to the U.S. District Court in place of the tapes themselves.

Stennis said he had understood that he would authenticate only two copies, one for the White House and one for the Senate Watergate committee," Stennis said. "There was never any mention about the court. I wouldn't have done it if there was. No, no, I was

once a judge and the courts can ask for what they want."

On Friday, October 19, when the White House announced the tapes compromise, President Nixon said that Stennis had "consented" to authenticate a tape transcript, copies of which would be made available to "Judge (John J.) Sirica — and also to the Senate Select committee."

Stennis said that he did not recall reading the White House statement.

An associate of the senator's said Stennis was "surprised and somewhat flabbergasted" when he learned of what he considered the unilateral change in the compromise by the White House that indicated that Judge Sirica would get a copy of the transcript.

Stennis himself would not say whether he was surprised, explaining that he didn't want to get into a dispute with the White House. "It was a new angle, that's all I'll say," he said.

The White House has cited the refusal of Cox to accept an authenticated written version of the tapes — the so-called "Stennis compromise" — as the major public justification for firing Cox on October 20.

Women's Wear Daily