

The White House Won't Comment

Washington

The White House refused yesterday to make a "premature comment" on the technical experts' findings about the erased Watergate tape but asserted that conclusions should not be drawn while the matter is still before the court.

However, Elliot L. Richardson, the former attorney general, and senators of both parties said that yesterday's revelations would be damaging to President Nixon.

The following statement was issued by the office of the white House counsel, James D. St. Clair:

"The summary of the report of the advisory panel on the White House tapes, which has gone to judge (John J.) Sirica, has been received and is under review.

"Since this received report is only a summary and since the matter is still within the jurisdiction of the district court, any premature comment would only contribute further to existing public confusion surrounding the tapes.

"However, while the White House will withhold immediate comment, it would be altogether incorrect and improper for pre-

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

mature judgments or conclusions to be reached in the absence of any judicial decision and while the process is still under way."

In Los Angeles, Richardson expressed "dismay and concern" at the disclosure that there had been repeated erasures of the tape of a conversation about the Watergate affair between President Nixon and his former Chief of Staff, H.R. Halde-
man.

"I think that the President and his administration have already faced and do face a serious problem of credibility and public confidence, and these findings certainly will not help," Richardson said.

Speaking to a civic association, Richardson said that he thought the findings would add to the pressures for impeachment of the President.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the ranking Republican on the Sen-

ate Watergate Committee, said in Memphis that the latest disclosure is "potentially damaging" to Mr. Nixon and is "another in an unfortunate, bizarre set of circumstances."

Another of the committee's Republicans, Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut, called it "a tragedy that anything is being handled in such a way as to impair the integrity of the tapes" and added, "that's what happened, apparently."

Senator Joseph M. Montoya (Dem-N.M.), remarked that the report "clearly confirms the already prevalent opinion of the nation as to the credibility of the President."

In Olympia, Wash., Senator Henry M. Jackson, said, "this creates the most serious problem to date. The burden has shifted to the president and his White House aides to explain what went on."

New York Times