

Watergate Panel Sets

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Dividing for the first time on party lines, the Senate Watergate Committee has decided to hold public hearings on President Nixon's campaign contributions from billionaire Howard Hughes and from dairy cooperatives.

The committee unanimously decided to ask again for a meeting with President Nixon to question him on the Watergate scandal. If he refuses, the committee said it may send him a written questionnaire.

It didn't say what would happen if he refused to answer that.

Committee Chairman Sam J.

Ervin, D-N.C., emerged from a three-hour closed meeting yesterday to announce that members had voted to conduct the inquiries in two weeks of public hearings next Tuesday, its four Democrats voting in favor and the three Republicans against.

The deciding vote reportedly was a proxy cast on behalf of Sen. Herman E. Talmadge, D-Ga., who left midway through the meeting. One participant said Talmadge was unenthusiastic about continuing hearings, but left a proxy with Ervin to vote as he thought best.

According to committee sources, chief counsel Samuel

JAN 24 1974

New Probe

Dash was "almost pleading" with senators to keep the hearings alive and promised to wrap them up in two weeks although other committee staffers said it couldn't be done.

"Dash would have done almost anything to keep the hearings going," said one source.

Dash has been saying publicly for weeks that hearings would resume and that investigators have uncovered very "significant" new information.

Participants at the meeting said Dash listed more than 30 prospective witnesses, but they said the list would have to be pared severely. They said the final witness list was certain to include Nixon's best friend, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo, former Treasury Secretary John B. Connally and at least two present or former Hughes aides.

Sen. Edward Gurney, R-Fla., was among the committee members who felt their investigations had gone as far as they could go in a year's work.

As regards the campaign contributions by Hughes and milk groups, he said:

"I think these issues have been certainly explored in the media and so I couldn't see any real point in going forward with it."

Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr., R-Tenn., vice chairman, said he wanted the panel to end its work and turn over findings to the House Judiciary Committee, now studying the possibility of impeaching Nixon.

"The matter compelling the attention of the American people at this time is impeachment," he said.

Ervin said the committee hearings would concentrate next week on a \$100,000 donation in cash by Hughes to Nixon through Rebozo. Rebozo said he kept the money in a safe for two years, then returned it to the recluse billionaire.

The week after next, Ervin said, the committee will hold hearings on a \$437,000 donation to Nixon's 1972 campaign and allegations it was tied to a 1971 hike in milk price supports, approved by the President.