

# Questions NYTimes FEB 11 1974

The members of the Senate Watergate committee have repeatedly tried to arrange a meeting with President Nixon at the White House. Since Mr. Nixon has consistently turned aside those requests, Senator Weicker, Republican of Connecticut, has now propounded eleven written questions to him that probe many of the outstanding factual issues in dispute in the Watergate scandal.

Taken together, they focus attention on the crucial problem of the President's personal responsibility in the notorious cover-up that apparently got under way in June 1972, immediately after the burglars were apprehended at the Watergate. Mr. Nixon insists that he had no knowledge of this matter before last March 21. He has, in effect, taken shelter behind the testimony of his former senior aides—John Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman, Charles Colson, and John Mitchell—who have thus far maintained an unbroken common front in asserting his lack of knowledge.

The main value of Senator Weicker's questions is that he has examined the public record and singled out those places where the testimony of these aides intersects with Mr. Nixon's professed ignorance. His first question is: "When John Ehrlichman discussed executive clemency with you in July 1972, prior to any indictment, trial or conviction, why didn't you ask how such a matter could possibly relate to what was being called a 'third rate burglary'?"

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A promise of Presidential clemency was apparently a key factor in inducing most of the Watergate burglars to plead guilty and keep silent about the involvement of higher officials in the Nixon campaign organization and in the White House. Only the President could make good on such a promise.

Both he and Mr. Ehrlichman have publicly stated that they discussed the possibility of clemency in July 1972. Senator Weicker shows that no satisfactory explanation has ever been forthcoming as to why the President and Mr. Ehrlichman discussed clemency at that time.

Mr. Nixon's own explanation is implausible. He said: "It was, on occasion, suggested as a result of news reports that clemency might become a factor." Senator Weicker's research has uncovered no news reports in June or July 1972, suggesting that the Watergate burglars might receive clemency.

The question remains—why were the President and Mr. Ehrlichman discussing clemency for the burglars at that time if it was not in connection with plans to hush up the whole affair?

Mr. Nixon's other main line of defense is that he was too busy with foreign affairs and the nation's business to think about politics in 1972. Senator Weicker has analyzed the official logs of the President's appointments. They suggest an entirely different picture. The logs which Mr. Weicker cites indicate that between June 20 and July 31, 1972, the longest meeting that the President held with Dr. Kissinger was 42 minutes. A few other meetings were held lasting twenty or thirty minutes each.

By contrast, the President met with Mr. Mitchell, his former campaign manager, for more than an hour and met with Senator Dole, the Republican National Chairman, and Clark MacGregor, Chairman of the Committee to Re-elect the President, for 54 minutes. He met repeatedly during those weeks for periods of two or three hours each with Charles Colson, his chief political lieutenant. He also met daily for lengthy periods with Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman and occasionally with other aides whose interests were political or legislative rather than in foreign affairs.

Mr. Nixon's record in diplomacy is politically his strongest card. But the question remains. How can the President claim that foreign affairs were pre-empting his attention when the record of his own appointments indicates something quite different?