

Jurors Vexed At Depositions In '72 Coverup

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Watergate grand jurors called for President Nixon's personal testimony last month partly because of dissatisfaction with depositions that were transmitted to them during the 1972 cover-up.

Informed sources said yesterday that Mr. Nixon had already indicated that he would respond to questions in writing when the grand jurors decided last month to ask the President to appear as a witness.

The grand jury foreman Vladimir N. Pregelj, wrote Mr. Nixon Jan. 30 that they had had a disappointing experience with testimony taken outside the grand jury room from high-level administration officials during their original investigation of the Watergate break-in.

Justice Department officials authorized the taking of depositions in secret from a number of top officials during the summer of 1972 before the seven foot-soldiers in the scandal were indicted. The Justice Department said it wanted to avoid the publicity that might have been generated by calling the high-ranking witnesses to the U. S. Courthouse here for appearances before the grand jury.

With the renewal of the investigation the next year, Watergate investigators were said to have been especially

chagrined in retrospect at the depositions of former Nixon campaign finance chairman Maurice Stans and former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson.

The letter from Pregelj on the grand jury's behalf was transmitted to the White House by Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

White House special counsel James D. St. Clair responded the next day, stating in a Jan. 31 letter that Mr. Nixon would not appear because he felt it would not be in the best interests of the office of the presidency. St. Clair, sources said, stated that it was regretful that the grand jurors had declined "sworn interrogatories" from the President in place of a personal appearance.

Mr. Nixon disclosed his rejection of the grand jury request at his press conference Monday night.

In light of the refusal, sources said, it is unlikely that any effort will be made by the grand jury to subpoena the President to testify.

With major indictments imminent, investigators apparently feel that their cases are ripe for prosecution and ought not be delayed for long legal battles over any effort to force the President to the witness stand.

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AS for the question of the President's personal involvement, Jaworski's staff has decided that the proper forum for determining that issue is the House impeachment inquiry.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Times reported that the Watergate grand jury might hand up a "presentment" of any evidence it has obtained regarding the President himself—along with any indictment of alleged Watergate conspirators.

Any such presentment, which lays out evidence without charging a crime, would be sealed when handed to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica, the Times said. Sirica would then have to decide whether to send it to the House Judiciary Committee for its impeachment inquiry.