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One Step Closer?

Watergate Indictments Put Pressure on House To Impeach President

Issue of Tax Fraud Is Likely To Be Raised; Indictments Involving 'Plumbers' Seen

Danger in an Ohio Election

WASHINGTON — More Watergate-related bombshells are coming—atop Friday's indictments of former top Nixon aides—and they seem certain to build intense pressure in the House for President Nixon's impeachment.

The indictments of H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Mitchell and other old Nixon hands are only the first of several shock waves threatening to hit the President during the next few weeks. Perhaps most immediately ominous is the secret report that the Watergate grand jury has given Judge John J. Sirica.

Washington is awash in reports that the grand-jury document contains damaging

This article was reported by Norman C. Miller, John Pierson and Carol Falk.

charges of presidential involvement in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in. One thing is sure: The House Judiciary Committee is determined to get the grand-jury report and supporting evidence for its impeachment inquiry. "If Sirica is sitting on evidence and won't give it to us, he is going to be the one risking impeachment," declares California Rep. Charles Wiggins, a senior Judiciary Committee Republican.

Threatening Developments

Beyond that, other developments in the offing clearly threaten Mr. Nixon. They are:

—A congressional committee finding, expected in about two weeks, that insiders say will hold that the President took improper income-tax deductions and owes perhaps as much as \$300,000 in back taxes. Moreover, members of the panel examining the President's tax returns say they probably will recommend that the House Judiciary Committee investigate whether the President may have been involved in tax fraud in claiming some deductions.

—Additional indictments of onetime Nixon aides. The next grand-jury charges may involve the activities of the White House "plumbers," who pulled off at least one burglary while investigating leaks of government information. Later, indictments are likely concerning contributions to the Nixon campaign by the dairy industry and also concerning the possible improper use of White House influence on behalf of International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. Finally, indictments are possible in the case of the famous 18-minute gap in the tape of a key White House meeting between President Nixon and Mr. Haldeman that was held just three days after the Watergate break-in. A report by

court-appointed experts already has indicated that the tape erasure didn't occur accidentally.

President Nixon himself almost certainly won't be charged in any further indictments; Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski appears to have made a firm decision that only Congress has the right to judge the President's conduct. Nonetheless, an enveloping array of indictments of former presidential aides will greatly damage Mr. Nixon.

"Any administration where the top men are indicted criminally certainly is one that doesn't deserve much honor. Therefore, it brings impeachment that much closer," asserts Rep. Richardson Preyer of North Carolina, a moderate Democrat, who was a federal judge in the 1960s.

—The danger of another Republican defeat in a special House election in Cincinnati tomorrow. The GOP loss of Vice President Gerald Ford's old congressional seat in Michigan two weeks ago heightened party fears that President Nixon's low standing might cause devastating Republican losses. While a GOP victory in Cincinnati would ease such concern at least a bit, a defeat in that GOP stronghold could cause some Republicans to conclude that Mr. Nixon is a political liability they can't afford.

"If we lose the election in Cincinnati, I think a bit of panic will set in," says veteran GOP Rep. Howard Robison of Upstate New York. "I think there will be increasing interest in the possibility of (the President's) resignation as a way around the dilemma."

Resignation Held Unlikely

The possibility of the President's resignation isn't taken seriously by many politicians. Mr. Nixon repeatedly has declared that he won't quit because he is innocent of any wrongdoing. "We're just plain stuck with him," says veteran Republican Rep. Albert Quie of Minnesota.

Still, it is a measure of the Republicans' disillusionment with the President that resignation talk continues. Indeed, within recent weeks Republican leaders of the House have discussed a "contingency plan"—involving a possible private demand by party leaders for the President's resignation, accompanied by a rather vague threat to "cut relations" with Mr. Nixon if he refuses.

In any event, the mood in Congress contrasts sharply with displays of White House confidence that the House won't vote to impeach Mr. Nixon. Among Congressmen, there is a mounting feeling that, unless Mr. Nixon can offer convincing evidence of his innocence, events will lead inexorably to impeachment by the House. "By May, when a vote may occur, I think there will be a national consensus in favor of impeachment so there can be a trial (of the President) in the Senate," a liberal House Democrat says.

Although long expected, the indictments Friday of top Nixon aides heightened the possibility of impeachment. "They increase the pressure. . . . We're one step closer to impeachment," says Rep. Albert Quie. "There's more likelihood now of a bipartisan impeachment proceeding," declares Rep. Richard Bolling of Missouri, an influential Democrat.

For, while the indictments had been anticipated, few were prepared for one allegation against Mr. Haldeman that also implicitly charges Mr. Nixon with participation in covering up the Watergate break-in. Specifically, Mr. Haldeman, the former White House chief

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of staff, was charged with perjury in telling the Senate Watergate Committee that Mr. Nixon had told John Dean that it would be "wrong" to pay hush money to the original defendants in the June 1972 break-in at the Democratic Party headquarters.

Mr. Nixon himself, in an August 1973 press conference, said he had told Mr. Dean, a confessed Watergate conspirator, that raising \$1 million would be "no problem." But the President emphasized that he had also told Mr. Dean that it would be "wrong." Mr. Dean's testimony, on the other hand, was that Mr. Nixon hadn't stated that all-important qualifier that a hush-money payment would be wrong. Instead, Mr. Dean said, the President had entertained the idea of hush-money payments.

The indictment against Mr. Haldeman, whose testimony to the Senate panel paralleled Mr. Nixon's statement, thus indicates that the grand jury and Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski believe Mr. Dean's version. Moreover, the indictment also indicates that the jury and Mr. Jaworski believe that a White House tape they have of the conversation corroborates Mr. Dean's testimony—not the statements of the President and Mr. Haldeman. It is widely presumed that the grand jury's secret report to the judge details the jury's findings about the President on this point.

"When you consider the report alongside the charge against Haldeman, it is really impossible to think the report would vindicate the President," says Minnesota Rep. Donald Fraser, a leading liberal. Says Rep. Gillis Long, a moderate Louisiana Democrat, "This appears to present a much more substantial case than has been presented in the past concerning possible presidential involvement in this affair."

"Serious Implications"

Senate Democratic Whip Robert Byrd of West Virginia also sees the indictments as having grim meaning for Mr. Nixon. "They pose serious implications for the President," he said on NBC's "Meet the Press" yesterday. "For the first time, the Watergate cover-up is brought directly to the Oval Office."

Sen. Byrd, like many other lawmakers, said he believes that "public opinion is probably growing" for impeachment by the House so that charges against the President may be brought to trial in the Senate. A majority vote of the House is necessary for impeachment, which is tantamount to an indictment. But a President may be convicted and removed from office only on a two-thirds vote of the Senate. And although many politicians think that impeachment by the House is becoming more likely, few are prepared to bet that Mr. Nixon's opponents will ever be able to muster a two-thirds vote of the Senate to actually oust him. A possible Senate trial is so far distant that there isn't any realistic way to assess it now.

Pressing for a Vote

The House, for its part, is increasingly determined to have its Judiciary Committee reach a decision on impeachment within a couple of months and to bring the issue to a floor vote in May or June. In pursuing this objective, more and more House members of both parties agree that neither the White House nor the courts should have the right to withhold evidence from the House committee, even if the airing of evidence in Congress might jeopardize the prosecution of onetime Nixon aides awaiting trial.

"Impeachment is of greater national interest and probably transcends the trials of individuals," GOP Rep. Wiggins of the Judiciary Committee says. Thus, he and others insist that the President can't withhold evidence that the committee requests because trials are in progress, as the White House has hinted it might try to do. Pointedly, Rep. Wiggins says: "I don't think the White House is going to stand on anything as flimsy as that."

The degree of White House cooperation with the House committee may become clear this week. Tomorrow the committee's special counsel, John Doar, will brief panel members on progress in gathering evidence, and a White House reply to the group's initial request for evidence is due soon. Also, committee members make it clear that they expect Judge Sirica to turn over the sealed grand-jury report to committee representatives this week.

Meantime, the special Watergate prosecution force is readying itself for what Mr. Jaworski describes as "protracted" trials of Watergate figures. Until Friday's indictments, the prosecutor had mainly negotiated guilty pleas with persons enmeshed in the scandal.

The Scorecard

To date, charges have been filed against 28 persons once associated with the President in the White House or during his 1972 reelection campaign. Of those, 15 have pleaded guilty or been convicted of crimes ranging from felonies to misdemeanors. In addition, 10 corporations or their officers have been accused of making illegal campaign contributions, all but one of them to the Nixon campaign. All the corporations except one have been fined; the one exception has entered an innocent plea and asked for a trial for itself and its chairman.

Seven individuals were charged in Friday's indictments and will give their formal responses at an arraignment this Saturday. The indictments allege that all seven persons were involved in a conspiracy—lasting right up to the filing of the charges—involving payments of hush money, destruction of documents, offers of executive clemency and schemes to obstruct functions of government agencies. Here are specific charges:

John N. Mitchell, former Attorney General and President Nixon's campaign manager at the time of the Watergate break-in—one count of conspiracy, one count of obstruction of justice, one count of making a false statement to the FBI on July 5, 1972, when he said he didn't know anything about the break-in except what he had read in the newspapers; two counts of making false declarations to the grand jury regarding his knowledge of the clandestine intelligence-gathering operation aimed at the Democrats and one count of perjury before the Senate Watergate Committee when he denied having discussed destruction of documents at a meeting two days after the break-in. Maximum penalty if convicted on all counts: 30 years in prison and a \$42,000 fine.

H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, President Nixon's chief of staff until last April 30—one count of conspiracy, one count of obstruction of justice, three counts of perjury before the Senate Watergate Committee with regard to his own and Mr. Nixon's knowledge of the payment of "hush money" and other aspects of the cover-up. Maximum penalty if convicted on all counts: 25 years in prison and a \$16,000 fine.

John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's top domestic aide until last April 30—one count of conspiracy, one count of obstruction of justice, one count of making a false statement to the FBI when he told its agents last July 21 that he didn't know anything about the Watergate break-in beyond what he had read in the newspapers; also, two counts of making false decla-

rations to the grand jury last May when he said he couldn't recall various things about the break-in and cover-up. Maximum penalty if convicted on all counts: 25 years in prison and a \$40,000 fine.

Gordon Strachan, a staff assistant to Mr. Haldeman until November 1972—one count of conspiracy, one count of obstruction of justice and one count of making a false declaration to the grand jury last April with regard to his handling of some of the "hush money." Maximum penalty if convicted on all counts: 15 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.

Charles W. Colson, special counsel to the President until last March 10—one count of conspiracy and one count of obstruction of justice. Maximum penalty if convicted on both counts: 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Kenneth W. Parkinson, an attorney representing the Committee to Re-Elect the President—one count of conspiracy and one count of obstruction of justice. Maximum penalty if convicted on both counts: 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Robert C. Mardian, a former assistant attorney general and an official of the Committee to Re-Elect the President—one count of conspiracy. Maximum penalty if convicted: five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.