

Nixon Readies Dual Defense

Washington

White House lawyers are preparing a two-pronged defense against the implication in last Friday's grand jury indictments that President Nixon may not have opposed hush-money payments to the Watergate defendants.

The grand jury did not say directly that Mr. Nixon had approved such payments. But one of its charges against H.R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, was that he lied when he testified under oath that

the President said, in a meeting last March 21, that "it would be wrong" to raise \$1 million to insure the silence of the seven original Watergate burglars.

First, according to sources close to the White House, the lawyers are ready to argue that the President did use a phrase during a conversation to the effect that "it would be wrong," the sources said. However, they said that although he used it in reference to a proposal to award executive clemency to the defendants, he also was conveying his belief that awarding of hush money also would be wrong.

"The President was saying that he was against clemency and the whole thing was wrong," said one person familiar with Mr. Nixon's legal defense.

Second, the lawyers are prepared to say that the payment of \$75,000 shortly after the March 21 meeting to H. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the Watergate burglars, had been set in motion before March 21 and had no connection with the meeting that lasted one hour and 40 minutes.

So far, neither the President's spokesmen nor his lawyers have made any public response to the indict-

ments of Haldeman and six other Nixon aides.

The Watergate grand jury had in its possession a tape recording of the March 21 meeting between Mr. Nixon, John W. Dean III, then the White House counsel, and Haldeman. Presumably, the jury's charge that Haldeman lied when he said Mr. Nixon remarked that "it would be wrong" to raise hush money was based on the information on the tape, which has not been made public.

However, Mr. Nixon and several of his aides who have listened to the tapes have given the conversation a different interpretation than either Haldeman or the grand jury.

Haldeman, in his testimony last July, said that in the meeting Mr. Nixon, responding to Dean's report that Hunt was demanding blackmail, "asked how much money would be involved over the years and Dean said probably a million dollars — but the problem is it is hard to raise. The President said there is no problem raising a million dollars, we can do that, but it would be wrong."

The grand jury, in indicting Haldeman for perjury, underlined the words "but it would be wrong" and asserted that Haldeman "knew they were false."

Mr. Nixon, at his August 22 news conference said that Haldeman's testimony was generally accurate but that he used "it is wrong" in connection with executive clemency. When Dean came to him with the proposal for raising money, Mr. Nixon said, "I said, isn't it quite obvious, first, that if it is going to have any chance to succeed, that these individuals aren't going to sit there in jail for four years? They are going to have clemency: isn't that correct?"

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