

President's Duty in The Case of Crime

Washington

Attorney General William B. Saxbe said yesterday that the President is "no different than any other citizen" when it comes to the duty to report immediately any information he receives about the commission of crimes.

Saxbe declined to say whether President Nixon had ignored this duty when he chose not to tell federal prosecutors, as soon as he found out, that "hush money" had been paid to the original Watergate defendants.

The attorney general said the question of whether Mr. Nixon had behaved improperly or illegally in the matter is "going to be one of the main issues" in the impeachment proceedings and that he did not "want to express an opinion."

Saxbe appeared to be contradicting, however, the contention made earlier this week by the President's chief defense counsel, James D. St. Clair, who said a President's legal duty, when he learns of the commission of a crime, is simply "to see" that the judicial process is put in motion and carried out.

St. Clair defended his client against suggestions that he had behaved illegally in not reporting the hush money payments and cited the fact that seven men had ultimately been indicted by a grand jury in the coverup case as proof of the fact that the President had carried out his duty.

At a news briefing, Saxbe also said that last week he "found" records showing that wiretapping by federal

authorities, without court order, between 1960 and 1972 was "prevalent" and "more widespread" than he had previously realized.

When Saxbe first mentioned the newly found information — which he said he found in an "unrelated file" in the receptionists' room of his suite of offices—he indicated that news reporters were among the persons wiretapped.

Subsequently, after a series of questions and an-

swers that left the matter somewhat confused, the attorney general said he could not say "for certain" that wiretaps had been used against any reporters other than the four reporters whose wiretaps were disclosed last year. Those reporters as well as 13 government officials had been tapped at various times between 1969 and 1971 in what was described by officials as an attempt to discover the source of news leak.

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