

Mitchell Denies Guilt

Insists Funds From Vesco Had No Strings

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NEW YORK, April 15—
Former Attorney General
John N. Mitchell, in more
than five hours of testi-
mony today strongly denied
that he was guilty of any
wrongdoing in his dealings
with fugitive financier
Robert L. Vesco.

Mitchell and Former Com-
merce Secretary Maurice H.
Stans are charged with con-
spiracy, obstruction of justice
and perjury in connection with
their handling of a secret
\$200,000 campaign contribu-
tion Vesco made to President
Nixon's 1972 re-election.

The 58-year-old former Attor-
ney General was head of the
Committee for the Re-election
of the President and Stans was
the committee's finance chair-
man.

Looking cool and detached,
Mitchell insisted that the con-
tribution was made without
any strings, even though the
Securities and Exchange Com-
mission was investigating Ves-
co dealings in the giant In-
vestors Overseas Services
(IOS) mutual fund.

The commission later charged
Vesco with systematically
looting millions of dollars
from IOS and the financier
fled.

Chief government prosecu-
tor John Wing asked Mitchell,
"Didn't you think he (Vesco)
was looking for something for
that contribution?"

Mitchell responded: "Absol-
utely not. The whole matter
would have ended right there."

Mitchell's dealings were
with a Vesco employee,
Harry Sears, who was also the
head of the New Jersey Com-
mittee for the Re-election of
the President and a prominent
Republican.

The former Attorney Gen-
eral, the first man ever to hold
that title to be indicted in a
criminal matter, testified that

all he was ever asked by Sears
was to arrange a meeting with
the then head of the SEC,
William J. Casey.

The prosecutor asked Mitch-
ell again, "Didn't it occur to
you that Mr. Vesco was look-
ing for something more than
just a meeting?"

Mitchell answered, "It never
occurred to me in any way,
shape or form.

"It never occurred to me be-
cause if Vesco wanted some-
thing for his money, we would
not have just asked for a
meeting."

Mitchell explained that
Sears, whom he described as a
political friend rather than a
personal one, told him that he
wanted a meeting with Casey
because, in Mitchell's words,
there was trench warfare be-

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tween Vesco's attorneys and
the SEC staff investigating
the financier.

Vesco wanted a meeting
with an SEC Commissioner to
discuss his troubles with the
Commissioner's staff.

Mitchell added that Sears'
description of Vesco's troubles
sounded minor and there was
no hint of the major charges
which were to follow at the
completion of the year-old
SEC investigation.

Mitchell testified that Sears
told him Vesco had been con-
sidering making a contribu-
tion as high as \$500,000 which
would have placed him among
the campaign's top donors.

At one point after Mitchell
answered a question from
Wing, he called the prosecutor
"Mr. Dean"—a reference to
the former Attorney General's
one-time protege, John Dean,
who is now a chief witness
against him.

Judge Lee Gagliardi inter-
vened to point out Mitchell's

error and a red-faced Mitchell
apologised.

In testimony this morning
Mitchell went through a litany
of denials of all charges
against him, then, when his
own attorney, Peter Fleming,
asked Mitchell "are you guilty
or not?" the prosecution ob-
jected.

Judge Gagliardi overruled
the objection and Mitchell
answered: "I am absolutely
not guilty of any of the
charges." Mitchell's testimony
continues tomorrow.