

Watergate Rebuttal Ruled 'Premature'

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) yesterday rejected as premature an attempt by President Nixon's lawyer to rebut staff evidence of the President's involvement in Watergate.

Attorney James D. St. Clair arrived at yesterday's closed session of the impeachment inquiry with a document which Rodino said was the President's response to staff evidence on the Watergate phase of the inquiry.

Rodino refused to accept it, stating that committee rules provide that only after the entire case for or against impeachment has been presented by the staff may St. Clair respond in a manner to be determined by the committee.

To permit St. Clair to offer a rebuttal statement limited only to the Watergate break-in and cover-up would give the nation a "distorted" view of the case, Rodino said.

St. Clair has said he considers Watergate the only important allegation against Mr. Nixon, although the committee is examining evidence on

several other possible im- the President's taxes, political "dirty tricks," wiretapping and peachable offenses such as break-ins, possible misuse of federal agencies and political contributions in return for favors.

St. Clair refused to discuss the incident with newsmen.

Yesterday, admonished again by Rodino against leaking confidential information, the committee heard evidence about the break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding in September, 1971, after Ellsberg had released the Pentagon Papers. This was a project of the "plumbers," the group set up by Mr. Nixon to try to stop such leaks.

Today the committee will hear about the offer of the FBI directorship to U.S. District Court Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. by White House aide John D. Ehrlichman while Byrne was presiding over Ellsberg's trial. Byrne dismissed the Ellsberg case in May, 1973, because of government misconduct in the Fielding break-in.



Associated Press

Judge Gerhard A. Gesell walks to courthouse before issuing decision on Ehrlichman notes case.