SFExaminer JUN 23 1974

Colson tells of early alert to the President

New York News

WASHINGTON — Charles Colson has told the House Judiciary Committee that he alerted President Nixon both in January and February of 1973 to high-level complicity in the Watergate affair.

Nixon has repeatedly insisted that his first such revelations were presented by John Dean in their conversation of March 21, 1973.

Colson's warnings were addressed specifically to the involvement of former Attorney General John Mitchell, who was director of the Committee for the Re-election of the President at the time of the Watergate burglary, and his deputy, Jeb Stuart Magruder.

(Committee officials, under heavy attack from the White House for recent leaks, would neither confirm nor deny the accounts of Colson's interview with the panel's counsel a week ago. But Colson's attorney and former law partner, David I. Shapiro, confirmed that "It's all there.")

In a day-long interview June 14 with committee counsel John Doar and minority counsel Albert Jenner, Colson said he complained to the President early in January, 1973, that his (Colson's) close friend and one-time college classmate, E. Howard Hunt, was facing a long jail sentence for the Watergate break-in while Mitchell, the man who Colson said engineered it, was back in New York getting rich on his lucrative law practice.

Colson said he told the President of Hunt's personal problems, including fhe recent death of Hunt's wife, Dorothy, in an airplane crash. He denied that he specifically asked the President to consider granting Hunt executive clemency, a charge that has been made by Dean.

Colson said he felt a personal obligation for Hunt because he helped get the retired CIA agent a job as a White House consultant, which began the chain of events that led Hunt into the plumbers unit, participation in the Ellsberg break-in and, later the Watergate break-in.

Colson said he gave Nixon a more detailed warning of high level involvement in the Feb. 14 meeting, when he said he told the President both Mitchell and Magruder had prior knowledge of the June 17, 1972 Watergate break-in, and had in fact approved the $250,000 intelligence plan that incorporated it.

Sources close to the judiciary committee called Colson's disclosure "significant" but not a major breakthrough in the impeachment inquiry.

The sources said "the case against the President" does not rise or fall on Colson's testimony but rather on hundreds of pages of evidence from many sources, of whom Colson is just one.

The Colson disclosure tends to strengthen the credibility of Dean—Nixon's chief accuser—who has steadfastly maintained that Nixon knew many details of high level involvement in the Watergate break-in and coverup before Dean's March 21, 1973, report.

Sources said Doar and Jenner plan to spend "many more hours" grilling Colson on Watergate, the ITT and milk producers cases, and the activities of the special White House Investigative unit called the "plumbers," including the burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

The former White House special counsel was a member of the "Inner circle" of top Nixon political advisors and is considered knowledgeable about alleged political "dirty tricks" and the use of government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service to attack "enemies" of the Nixon administration.

Colson was sentenced to one to three years in federal prison and fined $5,000 in federal court Friday after pleading guilty to obstructing justice in the Ellsberg case.

In his initial secret meet-

—Turn to Page 12, Col. 1

—From Page 1

ing with the House Impeachment staff, Colson was allowed to talk, Colson was al- narrative fashion and was not directly questioned by Doar and Jenner.

However, sources said Colson ultimately will be questioned closely, under oath, by the lawyers on a wide variety of subjects covered in the impeachment inquiry mandate.

A committee source said that "if Colson levels with us" — and he added that neither Doar or Jenner were yet certain that he would— he could well be one of the first witnesses before the 38-member Judiciary Committee as a whole.