

St. Clair Opens His Defense of Nixon

Washington

President Nixon's lawyer opened his formal impeachment defense yesterday with evidence aimed at demonstrating that Mr. Nixon was not involved in making hush money payments to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.

James D. St. Clair, Mr. Nixon's chief Watergate lawyer, began presenting the President's case to a closed session of the House Judiciary Committee. He said he thinks he will complete his presentation today.

St. Clair gave each member four books of evidence, each about the size of a big-city telephone directory. The largest dealt with the Watergate coverup.

The books covered all of the allegations heard by the committee while receiving evidence for seven weeks from its impeachment staff.

But before he entered the committee room, St. Clair acknowledged to newsmen that he is most concerned about presenting the President's version of the events of March 21, 1973.

That is the day Mr. Nixon has said he learned of the Watergate coverup and the day White House transcripts show the President discussed Hunt's demands for money.

"That is the area I think is most important," St. Clair said. During this phase of the inquiry St. Clair is limited to present facts. He is to present a summary argument later.

St. Clair's strategy was also disclosed in his request

From Page 1

to Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr., (Dem-N.J.), to be allowed to call six witnesses. A copy of the request was obtained by The Associated Press.

In it, St. Clair said he wanted to call former White House counsel John W. Dean III, who he expected to testify that when Dean met with Mr. Nixon on March 21, "the President did not direct hush money payments to be made to Hunt, nor did the President direct anyone to call (former Attorney General John N.) Mitchell concerning the hush money payments, but that at most the matter was 'left hanging' and nothing was resolved."

After a long, often bitter partisan debate on Wednesday, the committee voted to guarantee St. Clair only two of the six witnesses he requested. They are Dean and Frederick C. LaRue, a former Nixon campaign aide who was involved in arranging delivery of \$75,000 to Hunt's lawyer the evening of March 21.

St. Clair said he expects both Dean and LaRue will testify that they discussed Hunt's demand for money in a telephone conversation on the morning of March 21, be-

More Watergate-related news on Pages 12-15.

fore Dean discussed the same matter with the President.

The President's lawyer said he also expects the testimony to confirm that Dean told LaRue to contact Mitchell if he wanted authorization to meet Hunt's demand.

"LaRue will testify that no other authorization was given by any White House personnel for this payment," St. Clair said.

The committee is scheduled to begin hearing witnesses next Tuesday and to complete that phase of its inquiry on July 12.

After the opening presentation, committee Democrats quickly accused St. Clair of drawing conclusions rather than sticking to a straight factual presentation as the committee rules require.

Representative David Dennis (Rep-Ind.), told newsmen that the Democrats were "nitpicking."

"They are applying a double standard," he said. "When the committee staff was presenting its case, no one claimed we were follow-

ing rules of evidence."

Another Republican, Representative Delbert Latta of Ohio, said the complaints stemmed from St. Clair's practice of citing statements in testimony or from the presidential conversations and then telling the committee that it "confirms a certain position."

Latta said St. Clair was focusing on different statements and finding different emphasis from the same testimony and conversations cited earlier by the committee staff.

"It's about like using the Bible," he said.

Another complaint came from Representative Edward Mezvinsky (Dem-Iowa), and Representative Elizabeth Holtzman (Dem-N.Y.), who tried to prevent St. Clair from using edited White House transcripts for which the President had refused to supply the tapes. Their motion was overruled by the chairman.

"I question the accuracy of his presentation because of the edited transcripts," said Mezvinsky.

"The best evidence is the tapes themselves," said Miss Holtzman. "If it exonerates the President, I for one, would like to hear it."

Associated Press