

Tough Quizzing of Dean

Washington

John W. Dean III told the House Judiciary Committee yesterday he has a feeling — but isn't positive — that he told President Nixon about payment of hush money to Watergate defendants before March 21, 1973, which is when Mr. Nixon contends he first learned of it.

If Dean's feeling that he told the President of the payments were to be verified by White House tapes under subpoena, it would be a setback to efforts by the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair. St. Clair seeks to convince the committee that Dean was the one who set in motion the payment of \$75,000 to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt before giving the President a detailed account of the payments on the morning of March 21.

Dean's daylong appearance before the closed impeachment inquiry was from all accounts a dramatic confrontation between the 25-

year-old former White House counsel, whose previous testimony of the President's knowledge of the Watergate coverup has been damaging to Mr. Nixon, and the President's counsel, a skilled trial lawyer trying to save him from impeachment.

Dean impressed most members with his memory and his coolness under tough cross-examination. "He has done very well in the face of very skillful cross-examination," said Representative Robert McClory (Rep.-Ill.).

St. Clair's strategy has been to try to convince the committee that the only possible grounds for impeaching the President would be for involvement in the Watergate coverup, specifically the payment of hush money. Through a series of witnesses, he has tried to show that the sequence of telephone calls and meetings that resulted in the payment of Hunt on the evening of March 21 proves it was set

in motion before the President knew what was going on, and that this should tend to show he was not involved.

Members said Dean did testify, as St. Clair had hoped, that on March 21, before he met with Mr. Nixon, he telephoned Frederick C. LaRue at the Committee to Re-elect the President and relayed Hunt's request for money. LaRue paid the \$75,000 that evening on the advice of John N. Mitchell, former attorney general and former director of the Committee to Re-Elect the President who said he was told it was for legal fees.

But three members said Dean also testified that he had a "strong feeling," according to one, or a "vague memory," according to another, that he had told the President about hush-money payments in a conversation a few days before March 21. If that were true it would pretty much demolish St. Clair's contention that it is important to know whether Dean called LaRue on the

morning or the afternoon of March 21.

The committee has subpoenaed tapes of some of the pre-March 21 presidential conversations, but the President has refused to turn them over.

Representative George Danielson (Dem-Calif.) — one committee member who reported that Dean said he had a "strong, lingering feeling" of telling the President before March 21 that they needed to raise \$1 million in hush money — also said that "unless new evidence is presented, I think I have a clear constitutional duty to vote for impeachment." He had seemed to be leaning that way, but had not said so flatly.

Representative Lawrence Hogen (Rep-Md.), on the other hand, said that Dean's admission that he had got dates wrong in last year's appearance before the Senate Watergate Committee and other discrepancies casts doubt on his credibility.