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**PETERSEN BACKS
NIXON IN INQUIRY**

**Tells Panel He Never Got
Any Information Involving
President in Cover-Up**

By **DAVID E. ROSENBAUM**
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WASHINGTON, July 12—

Henry E. Petersen, who was in charge of the original Watergate investigation, defended today President Nixon's conduct in the days after the prosecutors began to break the case.

Mr. Petersen, still an Assistant Attorney General, reportedly told the House Judiciary Committee that he "never received any information which involved the President in any cover-up."

Democratic members of the committee, who are generally expected to vote to impeach the President, tended to discount Mr. Petersen's testimony as having come from a man who is still a subordinate of President Nixon.

"Petersen adores Nixon," said Representative Don Edwards, Democrat of California.

Mr. Nixon's Republican supporters said, however, that Mr. Petersen's testimony buttressed the President's cause.

Mr. Petersen declared that the President was entirely within his rights when he heard in confidence information that Mr. Petersen had received from the prosecutors and then passed the information on to his top assistants.

Representative Joshua Eilberg, a Pennsylvania Democrat, said that Mr. Petersen's statement was a "remarkable interpretation of law."

"He regards the President as King, above all law," Mr. Eilberg, a frequent critic of Mr. Nixon, added.

But Representative Lawrence J. Hogan, a Maryland Republi-

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Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, right, chatting with James D. St. Clair, President Nixon's chief defense lawyer, before Mr. Petersen testified at the impeachment hearing.

Petersen Defends President Before Panel in Inquiry

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can, said that he thought Mr. Petersen's argument was a good one. The President, he said, had to challenge his aides with the facts he had learned from Mr. Petersen about their involvement in the Watergate case.

The edited transcripts of the President's conversations with Mr. Petersen in April, 1973, show that Mr. Nixon promised him that he would keep certain information confidential and then did not do so.

On April 16, the President remarked to John D. Ehrlichman, then his chief domestic counselor, and Ronald L. Ziegler, his press secretary, that "I've got Petersen on a short leash."

That evening, he spoke with Mr. Petersen on the telephone, the transcripts show, and told him, "Anything you tell me, as I think I told you earlier, will not be passed on."

Mr. Petersen responded, "I understand, Mr. President."

And the President said, "Because I know the rules of the grand jury."

Mr. Petersen then proceeded to tell the President that Frederick C. LaRue, a campaign aide who had raised and distributed money to the Watergate burglars, had begun to

testify freely to the prosecutors.

The first thing the next morning, the President met with H. R. Haldeman, then his chief of staff, and told him to tell Herbert W. Kalmbach that Mr. LaRue was talking openly with the prosecutors. Mr. Kalmbach, then the President's personal lawyer, was also involved in passing money to the burglars.

Seemed in Awe

Mr. Petersen seemed in awe of the President, committee members said.

Referring to the time when Mr. Nixon chastised him for considering granting immunity to John W. Dean 3d, who had begun to level accusations at the President, Mr. Petersen reportedly told the committee, "You haven't been chewed out till you've been chewed out by the President."

Mr. Petersen reportedly confirmed that the President had mentioned to him the possibility of becoming director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but the Assistant Attorney General said that it was a vague mention and that the President did not offer him the job.

As for the President's sounding out Judge W. Matthew Byrne Jr., the judge in Daniel Ellsberg's trial, about the F.B.I. job, Mr. Petersen said that he

thought that Mr. Nixon had not acted improperly.

The only possible impropriety on the President's part, he reportedly testified, was his initial instructions to withhold from the Ellsberg trial the information that Dr. Ellsberg's former psychiatrist's office had been broken into by White House agents.

Dr. Ellsberg was on trial for conspiracy and theft of documents in connection with the disclosure of the Pentagon papers, a secret report on the Vietnam war.

Five Witnesses

Mr. Petersen was called before the committee on the recommendation of the impeachment inquiry staff. He was the seventh of nine scheduled witnesses.

With all five of the witnesses proposed by Mr. Nixon's defense lawyer, James D. St. Clair, having testified, the apparent consensus of committee members is that the President's case has not been helped significantly.

The five were Paul L. O'Brien, a lawyer for the President's reelection committee; William O. Bittman, the former lawyer for E. Howard Hunt Jr.; Frederick C. La Rue, a campaign aide;

John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General and campaign director, and John W. Dean 3d, former White House Legal counsel.

All were called by Mr. St. Clair to rebut the allegation that Mr. Nixon ordered or sanctioned the payment of \$75,000 to Mr. Hunt, one of the convicted Watergate conspirators, to keep him from testifying freely.

Representative Jack Brooks, a Texas Democrat who is an outspoken critic of the President, said that the witnesses had driven him "stark raving mad."

Representative Joseph J. Maraziti, New Jersey Republican who has generally supported Mr. Nixon's cause, said that the testimony had been helpful.

But the handful of Republican members who apparently are still undecided about their ultimate vote did not seem to have been swayed in the President's favor.

In fact, three men believed to be in this category—Representatives Henry P. Smith 3d and Hamilton Fish Jr. of upstate New York and Robert McClory of Illinois—said they thought that Mr. Dean's testimony had damaged the President's case.