

Colson's Version Of Ellsberg Case

Washington

Charles W. Colson reportedly testified yesterday that he was told last year that President Nixon had approved "the operation" by the "Plumbers" unit that led to the burglary of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

Yesterday was the first time that Colson, who was President Nixon's special counsel and a key political operative, testified under oath about the broad range of allegations that the House Judiciary Committee is considering in its impeachment inquiry.

The committee's interrogation lasted late into the night.

Much of Colson's testimony about Mr. Nixon's role in the burglary of the psychiatrist's office had come out in the trial that ended last week in the conviction of John D. Ehrlichman and three others.

Nonetheless, several committee members said that Colson's sworn statements in this area were seriously damaging to Mr. Nixon's cause.

Colson reportedly said that in the spring of 1973 Ehrlichman, who was the President's chief adviser on domestic policy, told him that the President had approved "the operation" to gain access to derogatory information about Ellsberg.

Asked by reporters as the committee broke for dinner what he had meant by "the operation," Colson replied:

"I just used the precise words (Ehrlichman) used."

A reporter then asked whether he thought the

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words meant a burglary.

Colson responded, "It doesn't necessarily mean a burglary."

Representative Elizabeth Holtzman (Dem - N.Y.) said that there was no question in her mind that Ehrlichman had been speaking of a burglary because, at the time, he was giving Colson "reasons for not talking to the prosecutors."

Committee members noted that Ehrlichman was convicted last week of violating the civil rights of the psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis H. Fielding, even though the evidence showed that Ehrlichman had authorized a "covert operation" and not specifically a burglary.

Mr. Nixon, in a sworn statement provided during the Ehrlichman trial, acknowledged that he had set

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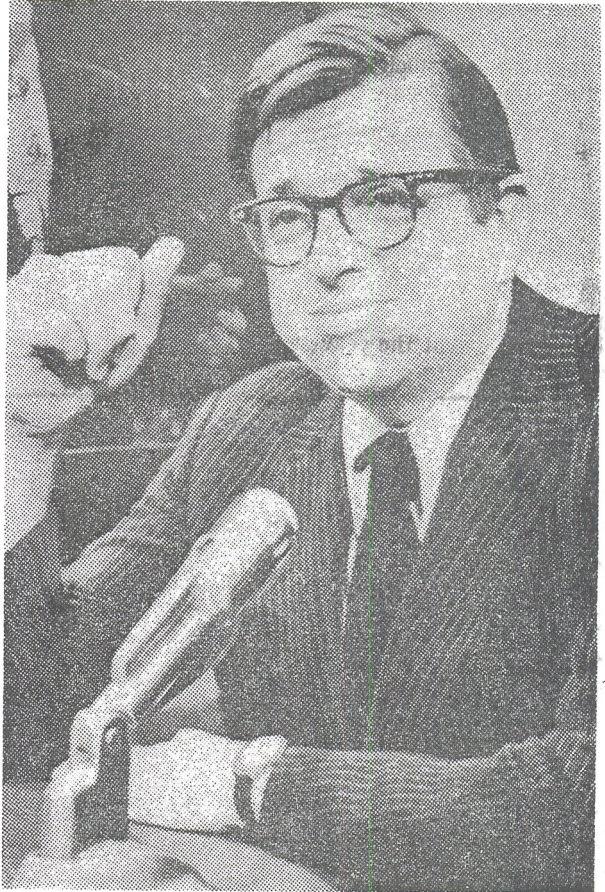
up a special unit in the White House to investigate unauthorized leaks of information to the press.

Mr. Nixon said that he had instructed this unit to ferret out information about Ellsberg, whom he considered a serious risk to the national security.

A White House spokesman in San Clemente, Calif., where the President is staying, discredited Colson's remarks.

"I don't know what was said," Presidential Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said.

"But I do know the facts are clear and that the Presi-



AP Wirephoto

CHARLES COLSON ON CAPITOL HILL
He testified before the House Judiciary Committee

dent learned of the break-in March 17. He was not aware of it prior to that time as all of the evidence and all of the tapes show and as the President has stated.

"We have said the Presi-

dent authorized the establishment of an intelligence gathering unit. But he at no time authorized or was aware of a break-in until he was told March 17."

New York Times