

Butterfield Says Nixon Controlled Election Committee

By Jules Witcover
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Alexander P. Butterfield, the presidential assistant who first revealed the existence of the voice-activated recording system in the Oval Office, told the House Judiciary Committee in his July 2 closed-door testimony that President Nixon "absolutely" ran his 1972 re-election committee from the White House.

Butterfield, in testimony obtained by The Washington Post, said Mr. Nixon made "the big decisions" for the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

"Anything having to do with strategy would emanate from the President and be carried to the committee via (H.R.) Haldeman and Gordon Strachan," said Butterfield, who now is Federal Aviation Administrator.

The President, in explaining how the Watergate break-in and associated scandals could have occurred, has said that the press of foreign policy matters in 1972 persuaded him for the first time in his political career to shift the campaign burden to subordinates.

"That is why I decided, as the 1972 campaign approached," he said in his April 30, 1973, Watergate talk, "that the presidency should come first and politics second. To the maximum extent possible, therefore, I sought to delegate campaign operations, and to remove the day-to-day campaign decisions from the President's office and from the White House."

Mr. Nixon said, however, that "the man at the top must bear the responsibility" and that he accepted it for any wrong doing in his re-election campaign.

Butterfield's observations on presidential involvement in the 1972 campaign constituted only a few lines in 269 pages of testimony before the Judiciary Committee.

He said he was stating his opinion, "because I was not involved myself in the business, although it was . . . going on pretty much all around me."

But in his view, he said, "The White House pretty much ran the committee business except for the field operations. The White House called the shots. By the White House, I mean Mr. Haldeman.

came up and during which Mr. Haldeman made it very clear that we were enunciating committee policy . . . I overheard all kinds of comments about what we wanted the committee to do now, later, etc.

"There were a great many meetings between the President and John Mitchell over in the EOB office after dinner in the evenings, during which I assume—I don't know—that committee business was being discussed. It was at the time that the committee was formed."

Butterfield also testified that Haldeman used nearly three-fourths of all the President's time allocated to meeting with White House staff aides and that Haldeman acted "on no significant items" without the knowledge of the President.

James D. St. Clair, the President's chief defense counsel for the impeachment inquiry, questioned Butterfield and drew an admission that he was not present much of the time Mr. Nixon and Haldeman were together. But Butterfield denied he was dealing merely in "shop talk of gossip" about the closer relationship of the two men.

Butterfield characterized Mr. Nixon as a "detail man" who, despite great pressures on his time, involved himself in many seemingly trivial decisions on many matters as well as major ones.

Before social functions, the former White House aide said, Mr. Nixon "debated whether we should have a U-shaped table or round table . . . He was very interested in meals and how they were served . . . and was usually put out if a state dinner was not taken care of in less than an hour or an hour's time."

Mr. Nixon also reviewed all guest lists, and no names were added or deleted without his approval. He checked them for party proportions, area of country, "how many blacks, how many ethnics, how many labor members might be invited," Butterfield said.

At White House ceremonies, Mr. Nixon wanted to know where the military would stand, what uniforms White House police would wear, "whether or not the Secret Service would salute during the Star-Spangled Banner and sing . . ."

Butterfield said Mr. Nixon also debated whether the wife of a prisoner of war should be the West Lobby receptionist and during his trip to Yugoslavia was so impressed "by the fine restrooms along the way there" that he dictated a memorandum about improving restrooms on the Mall in Washington.

"In my mind, all of these things are understandable," Butterfield said. "I think they are all typical of a thoughtful and careful and well disciplined man, but they certainly do bring out the fact that he was highly interested in detail."

"With regard to strategy, with regard to tactics—I don't mean getting right down to details of tactics—but the committee was pretty much an extension of the political White House."

There was "much communication" between Mr. Nixon and John N. Mitchell and later Clark MacGregor, the two campaign committee managers, and between Haldeman and the same two men, and Strachan, Haldeman's "assistant for that purpose, Butterfield said.

"For two years, this committee liaison was going on pretty much under my nose . . . I was in a number of meetings, Haldeman meetings, staff meetings large and small, during which committee business