

Grease for the Wheel, a Short Answer and Other Watergate Tidbits

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Until just lately, Room G-334 in the New Senate Office Building was kept under such tight security that even cleaning crews were not permitted to enter.

The staff of the Senate Watergate committee was afraid that someone, somehow, might bug the room, where committee investigators interviewed mols of the major witnesses who subsequently testified in the committee's televised hearings, and many others who did not.

It was in Room G-334 that Alexander P. Butterfield first disclosed the existence of the White House taping system.

Today, the room was thrown open, as a sort of reading room, to Senate staffs and members of the press who wanted to read previously unpublished typed transcripts of Watergate Committee interviews with witnesses.

There were 186 interviews with 149 individuals ranging (alphabetically) from Mar-

jorie Acker, an assistant to President Nixon's administrative assistant, Rose Mary Woods, to Arthur J. Wolfson-Smith, who runs a private intelligence firm that did some political work in 1972.

There appeared to be little that was new in the transcripts but there were some additional tidbits of information or argument:

John D. Ehrlichman, formerly the top White House adviser on domestic policy, affirmed that President Nixon himself had been behind what was known as the "responsiveness program" to make Federal agencies take political considerations into account in their programs and contracts.

"I was aware of a desire on the President's part that there be more political thought given to decisions than was being given in the departments," he said. "And every once in a while, something would be said at a Cabinet meeting to sort of sensitize people to this desire on the President's part." Even so, he complained,

there were "an awful lot of really dumb things being done out in the departments. They were just not bright."

Mr. Ehrlichman complained, in particular, of "a fellow named James Allen, who was Commissioner of Education, who was doing a lot of things that were just across the grain politically as far as the President was concerned."

He said he could not recall what the issue was, that it might have been school desegregation or pushing Mr. Allen was subsequently asked to resign and did so, after he publicly criticized the Administration's war policies.

Mr. Ehrlichman did not finch when asked about a letter to Mr. Nixon from a lawyer for Associated Milk Producers, Inc., in December, 1970, seeking a cut in milk-import quotas and citing a \$2-million commitment for campaign contributions.

While Mr. Ehrlichman said he had no recollection of ever seeing the letter from the lawyer, Patrick Hillings, he expressed no surprise at its

contents.

"The fact that there is an implied promise of support or some measure of duress involved is pretty much standard fare," he said. "That's the way letters come in there by the hundreds."

When pressed as to whether the sum mentioned might be memorable, Mr. Ehrlichman commented:

"That's the grease that turns the wheel in this town, on the Hill as well as in the executive branch. And I think you have to be a little realistic about this."

Among the shortest answers ever got to any question was from Frank E. Fitzsimmons of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, who was asked about reports that the teamsters had given large sums to the Nixon reelection campaign in expectation of a pardon for the union's former president, James R. Hoffa.

"That's a goddamn lie!" roared Mr. Fitzsimmons. "Would you like to make a statement?" the interviewer

asked.

"That is my statement," said Mr. Fitzsimmons.

The name of Roger V. Barth is the man in the Internal Revenue Service who did political chores for the White House was known around Washington for some time before the Nixon Administration scandals began to unfold. But the word apparently had not reached Kenneth W. Gemmill, the tax lawyer in Philadelphia who has done work for both the Presi-

dent and his friend Charles G. Rebozo.

Mr. Gemmill testified that he had not known Mr. Barth before he was told that Mr. Barth was the man to see about the tax investigation of Mr. Rebozo. When he looked Mr. Barth up in the I.R.S. telephone directory and found him in the chief counsel's office—which ordinarily has no connection with investigations of possible tax evaders—"that is what made me think he couldn't possibly have anything to do with what I wanted to talk about."