

Colson Says He Told Nixon in

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In two meetings with President Nixon in January and February of 1973, Charles W. Colson told the President that John N. Mitchell "had to know" about Watergate, according to testimony before the House Judiciary Committee released yesterday.

Colson also testified he cautioned the President in those mid-winter meetings spread into the White House.

President Nixon has repeatedly asserted he was not aware that his top aides were involved in Watergate until mid-March of 1973.

Colson said he had expressed his concerns to the President immediately after

a meeting with H. R. (Bob) Haldeman which had left Colson "dissatisfied."

Colson testified he had met with Haldeman in late January—he could not remember the specific date—to convey a report that John W. Dean III had been present at a meeting or meetings in Mitchell's office prior to the Watergate break-in of June, 1972 in which eavesdropping and electronic devices were discussed.

"I said," Colson recounted, "that I was very concerned that the White House could get involved in this, that the matter could become a lot more serious, the Watergate matter."

"I then raised a second question with Bob . . . I said

you know they are raising funds for the defendants in this case and this could get smelly, this could be interpreted as hush money."

According to the Colson testimony, Haldeman said that "he knew all about" the Dean-Mitchell meeting, that Dean had informed him of it, and that it had been entirely proper. Regarding the payment of funds to Hunt, Colson said, "Haldeman's answer to that was there is no reason why friends can't go out and raise money to help people pay for their legal defenses."

"It happens all the time. Defense funds are common, and after all, there is a defense fund for Angela Davis, and why can't they have a defense fund?"

Having been dismissed by Haldeman, Colson told the committee, he raised his concerns in subsequent conversations with the President.

"I know," said Colson, "on one occasion at least I said to the President I just think Mitchell had to know about this (Watergate)."

"I said what worries me most about Watergate now is that it could spread into the White House. And the President said—I said it could spread into the White House, into the White House staff, and the President said who, Bob and John? And I said, since I didn't know, I just shrugged my shoulders."

On the subject of executive clemency, Colson denied he had ever discussed

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it with the President, though he noted that during one February conversation the President expressed doubt that E. Howard Hunt Jr., would ever go to jail.

Stating that he had mentioned to the President how "choked up" he was over Hunt's situation, since Hunt was a close friend, Colson testified that the President interrupted to say, "I just can't believe, Chuck, in the circumstances you have just described, with his wife in that shape and his kids . . . I just can't believe that he will go to jail."

It was this conversation, Colson told committee members, "that I think has caused all the confusion in this committee and elsewhere about whether indeed commutation, executive clem-

ency or anything else was ever committed by the President."

The official transcripts—Book III of witness testimony taken by the committee in closed session two weeks ago—reveals that Colson had difficulty recalling specific dates and wording in conversations, though he was repeatedly pressed for particulars by committee members and staff lawyers.

There was no discussion of Colson's recent religious conversion or of his current state of mind. The former special counsel to the President—pleaded guilty last month to efforts to smear Daniel Ellsberg for releasing the Pentagon Papers.

As a key White House insider, Colson was involved in several of the events that

have served as the basis for allegations that Mr. Nixon should be impeached and removed from office. But beyond his discussion of the mid-winter talks about Watergate, Colson gave no testimony about improper actions by the President.

Colson testified he was told by former top White House aide John D. Ehrlichman that Mr. Nixon had approved the "Ellsberg operation" on national security grounds. But he said he did not think by "operation" Ehrlichman meant the actual break-in, since Colson said he personally was convinced the President did not know of the break-in beforehand.

As White House liaison with the dairy industry

when the President ordered a large increase in milk price supports after the industry had pledged \$2 million in contributions to the President's campaign, Colson was in a position to implicate the President.

He testified that he and Murray Chotiner had met with representatives of the Association of Milk Producers Inc. in July, 1970 and received a pledge of \$2 million. But he added, "when they were talking about such a large contribution I remember Mr. Chotiner said don't expect any quid pro quos. Don't come around here and flaunt the fact that you are a big contributor and expect to get anything in return."