

Ford Urged to Clarify Role in Watergate Probe

Washington

The chairman of the House banking committee said yesterday that President Ford should make a prompt, public explanation of conflicting accounts about Mr. Ford's role in blocking a 1972 congressional investigation into the source of money found on the Watergate burglars when they were arrested in 1972.

Representative Henry S. Reuss (Dem.-Wis.) said in a statement from Milwaukee that Watergate special prosecutor Charles Ruff should also conduct an overall inquiry into the squelching of the 1972 investigation by Reuss's committee, which then was headed by Representative Wright Patman (Dem.-Tex.), who

died last year.

The retrospective controversy warmed up again as a result of remarks by former White House counsel John W. Dean 3rd that were televised yesterday on the National Broadcasting Co.'s "Today" show.

Dean named Richard Cook, former chief lobbyist for the Nixon White House in the House of Representatives, as "the man who did the leg work" and dealt with then-House minority leader Ford, among others, on blocking the Patman investigation.

During confirmation hearings on his nomination to become vice president, Mr. Ford acknowledged

that he had met with Republican members of the banking committee about the inquiry. He said he tried to block the probe because he felt it would set a bad precedent for inquiries into presidential affairs. He denied that his efforts to block the investigation were made at the behest of the White House.

However, Dean, when asked to check his records regarding his contacts with Cook, said they showed about 15 contacts with Cook, between September 6 and October 12, 1972. In more than half a dozen of these conversations, Dean told NBC, Cook reported on meetings with Mr. Ford about the Watergate problem.

The House committee blocked

the proposed investigation on October 3, 1972, by a vote of 20 to 15, with all 14 Republicans on the committee, along with six Democrats, voting against the investigation.

Now a lobbyist for Lockheed, Cook accused Dean of "cheap huckstering" for his just-published Watergate book. Cook said that "despite John Dean's repeated and frantic requests, I never spoke with Mr. Ford about the need to deny Mr. Patman's request for subpoena power."

Cook said he had met with Dean on the issue "because Dean was frantic" that the hearings might be held. But Cook added pessimistically:

"Don't tell me that anyone (disputing) Dean can come out other than second best. John Dean titillates the whole world. He could nail anyone . . ."

White House press secretary Ron Nessen was quoted as saying that Mr. Ford would stand by his congressional testimony and would have nothing to add.

The two other House Democrats, Elizabeth Holtzman of New York and John Conyers Jr. of Michigan joined in calling on prosecutor Ruff to determine whether Mr. Ford had told the truth during his 1973 vice-presidential confirmation hearings.