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Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles Ruff has disclosed he will not listen to the White House tapes in order to determine whether Gerald Ford was involved in an effort to head off the Watergate investigation.

Fred Graham has the story.

[Graham:] Ruff sent letters to Capitol Hill today to explain that he will not grant a request of three House Democrats and listen to some 200 White House tapes of conversations between Richard Nixon and then House minority leader Gerald Ford.

Ruff said he has concluded that even if Mr. Ford had been a part of the successful White House effort to shut off an investigation of the Watergate break-in by the House Banking Committee, this would not have been a criminal offense. Ruff said there does not appear to have been an obstruction of justice by anyone because there was no evidence of criminal intent, only a successful effort to influence the political and legislative judgments of congressmen not to investigate the break-in.

Ruff also declined to investigate allegations of perjury against Mr. Ford for testifying that he did not take part in the effort to shut down the investigation. Perjury before a congressional committee would have to be investigated by the Justice Department, Ruff said.

Fred Graham, CBS News, Washington.