

A Ford Letter in '72 Opposed an Early Watergate Probe

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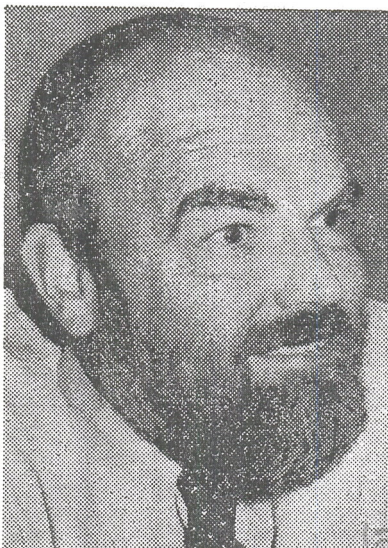
Washington

President Ford, while House minority leader, sought to rally Republicans against an early Watergate investigation on grounds it was "irresponsible" and "motivated by political considerations," according to a Ford letter obtained yesterday by the Los Angeles Times.

The 1972 letter, which was distributed to GOP members of the House Banking Committee, referred to "political overtones" of the panel's proposed inquiry into Watergate finances.

The letter also said the constitutional rights of the men indicted on charges of committing the Watergate burglary should be protected.

The letter did not mention any White House contacts with Mr. Ford, which is consistent with Mr. Ford's previous testimony. Such contacts have been alleged by



JOHN EHRLICHMAN
'Nobody brought it to me'

former White House counsel John W. Dean III.

The letter does show that Mr.

Ford stongly urged Republican members to attend a crucial Banking Committee meeting, the same strategy discussed by then-President Nixon and his aides about two weeks earlier.

Mr. Ford's letter, drafted by Graham Northrup, a Republican aide on the committee, said it was "imperative" and of "utmost importance" that GOP members attend a meeting at which subpoena power would be proposed by the committee chairman, the late Representative Wright Patman (Dem-Tex.).

The tape of a White House meeting, Sept. 15, 1972 — about two weeks before the Ford letter —

showed Dean told Mr. Nixon that Mr. Ford and Richard Cook, a White House lobbyist, were "gonna march them (the Republican members) into that committee room like cattle, all together."

"Nobody's gonna be off playing golf that day," Dean added.

The result was that all 14 Republicans attending the meeting Oct. 3, 1972, joined six Democrats to defeat the subpoena move by a 20-to-15 vote.

Northrup, the committee aide who drafted the letter at Mr. Ford's request, said Mr. Ford signed it and sent it to GOP members in late

September, 1972.

Former Presidential aide John D. Ehrlichman said yesterday that he never contacted Mr. Ford about the proposed Patman investigation despite contrary indications in the September 15 tape.

Ehrlichman, in an interview, agreed that the "bottom line" of the September 15 White House meeting — which he did not attend — was that he was to contact Mr. Ford.

"That's right," Ehrlichman told the Times. "The problem is that nobody bothered to tell me that. Nobody ever brought it to me."

He added, "I have no knowl-

edge that Ford was ever contacted."

Ehrlichman said it would not have been unusual for White House lobbyists such as Cook or William E. Timmons to have contacted Mr. Ford about the Patman inquiry. But he stressed that "I have no information" that this happened.

Patman's committee meeting occurred one month before the 1972 presidential election and two weeks after the first Watergate burglary indictments. The meeting was called to vote on a Patman proposal that 23 witnesses be subpoenaed, including White House aides and Nixon campaign officials.

Los Angeles Times