

Nixon makes his choice

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WASHINGTON — President Nixon's refusal to voluntarily turn over tapes and documents to the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment investigation last week gave the clearest indication yet of his long-range strategy to avoid being hounded out of office by a vote of two-thirds of the Senate.

Simply stated, the issue is this: He will fight impeachment on the grounds of contempt of Congress and not on the issue of whether or not he helped to obstruct justice in the Watergate cover-up.

Despite a last-minute at-

tempt by the White House to strike a deal, the committee voted last Thursday to slap a subpoena on Nixon for the documents it had been seeking for 45 days — tapes, dictabelts, transcripts and logs of some 41 conversations having to do with Watergate.

If Nixon talks, the Judiciary Committee can do little as far as securing the materials is concerned.

If Nixon ignores a contempt citation, however, the committee can include contempt of Congress as an impeachable offense.

It is evident Nixon be-

lieves he can survive in office if contempt is the issue rather than the evidence on the tapes.

According to some Republicans, both senators and congressmen, Nixon may be thinking along the following lines: The committee will probably vote articles of impeachment, including contempt of the House. The full House may or may not buy this argument, but if it does, the Senate will reject it.

One leading Republican on Judiciary privately put it this way: "He may be on the right track. The Senate already holds the House in contempt in a different way, anyhow."