

THE GOVERNMENT SHUT

Republicans Threaten to Impeach Rubin if He

By Steven Pearlstein
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House Republicans yesterday turned up the pressure on the Clinton administration by suggesting they might initiate impeachment proceedings against Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin if he continued to ignore the will of Congress by borrowing more money for the Treasury.

Reps. Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.) and Christopher Cox (R-Calif.) raised the impeachment specter after Rubin met for 90 minutes with key legislators at the Capitol to discuss the impasse over increasing the \$4.9 trillion ceiling on federal debt. Raising the debt ceiling is mired in the larger battle over balancing the federal budget.

"Those of us who are concerned with the constitutionality of Secretary Rubin's behavior will be watching him closely and will support impeachment proceedings should he continue to bypass the Constitution," said Solomon, chairman of the House Rules Committee.

Minutes after Solomon's comments moved on news services, prices for U.S. Treasury bonds took a sharp dive, losing about 1 percent of their value. The effect was to raise yields on the benchmark 30-year bond to 6.03 percent from 5.95 percent late Wednesday. Some stock market analysts also attributed a portion of the 20.23-point slide in the Dow Jones industrial average to the impeachment threat.

Solomon and other Republicans were enraged late last year when Rubin, in an effort to avert a

first-ever default on U.S. government obligations, invoked his authority under the law to replace government securities held in two federal employee retirement accounts with IOUs. Rubin then issued new debt to pay off bondholders when their Treasury bonds came due.

Yesterday Rubin told House members that he was considering taking additional steps to avoid default. He said his legal advisers are exploring similar options should the debt ceiling be unchanged when the Treasury faces its next cash crunch in mid-February.

At the meeting, Cox said he warned Rubin that if he tried again to avert default, "it would set in motion a series of hearings and inquiries that would be dedicated to a political resolution of this matter."

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DOWN

Borrows Again to Avoid Default

A "political resolution," Cox explained, might include removing a Cabinet member from office, but quickly added that any talk of impeachment was still "premature."

Howard Schloss, a spokesman for Rubin, dismissed the Republican threats yesterday as a "political ploy" designed to take the public attention off the Republican-engineered partial shutdown of the federal government. And other Republicans quickly moved to try to downplay the constitutional confrontation.

The chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Robert Livingston (R-La.), said of the impeachment threat, "It's not in my curriculum," the Associated Press reported. And Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee,

which would consider any impeachment resolution, studiously declined comment.

According to House officials, only one Cabinet member, William Belknap, secretary of war in the Grant administration, has ever been impeached by the House. Belknap was later acquitted by the Senate.

Republicans, backed by a legal opinion prepared by former Republican attorneys general William Barr and Edwin Meese, argue that the Constitution vests Congress with the sole authority to decide how much debt the government can take on. When Rubin exchanged federal debt for non-interest-bearing IOUs in two federal employee retirement funds last November, he effectively usurped the power of Congress, they said.