

Impeachment Action Pressed

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House Judiciary Committee Republicans agreed at a closed caucus yesterday to press for "expeditious action" on the possible impeachment of President Nixon.

Without directly criticizing Judiciary Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.), the committee's 17 Republicans set the stage for charges of foot-dragging against the 21-member Democratic majority.

"There were some apprehensions expressed that they might want to string it out, to the country's detriment, as well as our own," said one GOP member after the session.

While not setting a specific timetable as a target for the committee, the Republican members made two procedural suggestions that may draw controversy at a meeting of the full committee today.

They urged that the preliminary phases of the investigation be turned over to a "manageable subcommittee," suggesting that it consist of five Democrats and four Republicans.

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Second, they suggested that the subcommittee conduct all its work in closed session, on the grounds that its proceedings are comparable to those of a grand jury in an ordinary criminal proceeding, which are protected from public disclosure.

Both the suggestions — that the investigation be entrusted to nine members of the committee, presumably high in seniority, and that its work be closed to the public—are likely to draw opposition from junior Democrats on Judiciary, who have led the fight for impeachment proceedings.

But Rep. Robert W. Kastenmeier (D-Wis.), a high-ranking liberal Democrat, said he thought most Democrats agreed to the necessity of a smaller unit than the 38-man committee starting the proceedings and could see a case for keeping at least the preliminary proceedings secret.

"What the Republicans want is attainable," Kastenmeier said. "I don't think there should be a partisan split on this."

A meeting of the full Judiciary Committee is scheduled for today, with the possibility that Rodino may use the occasion to brief the members on his search for a special counsel to head the investigation of the President.

In a statement Sunday, the chairman said he expected to make the choice "before Christmas." He has reportedly been in contact with various Republican judges and former Justice Department officials, but has not shared his thoughts with others on the committee.

Meantime, Rodino said, a staff of 31 people, drawn from the committee's regular payroll and the General Accounting Office, has been working under the committee's general counsel, Jerome Zeifman.

Much of their work, thus far, has centered on obtaining and analyzing investigative reports from other congressional committees that have studied Watergate-related matters, campaign finances and other transactions involving the President.

Rodino has received complaints from some committee Democrats about the lack of visible progress on impeachment in the past six weeks. The matter was referred to the committee on Oct. 22 and the House voted \$1 million for the investigation on Nov. 15.

In recent days, several Republicans have charged that the Democrats are prolonging the impeachment proceedings in order to bring them into the 1974 mid-term election period.

In an interview on the public television program, Washington Straight Talk, last night, Republican National Chairman George Bush said, "I expect they (the Democrats) will continue to drag it on out, but at some point, the American people are going to say, 'Get off his back.'"

Kastenmeier, on the other hand, said that charge was "not plausible," because the liberal Democrats accused of that tactic are themselves under the strongest pressure of any members of Congress to impeach the President.