

In Iowa, Debate on Impeachment

By **SETH S. KING**
Special to The New York Times

SPIRIT LAKE, Iowa, Jan. 10 —“Until they prove he’s a criminal, I’m going on buying him,” said Orren Olson. “But they should either impeach him or get off his back, and if Wiley decides, on the evidence, that he ought to be impeached, then we’ll support Wiley in that.”

Mr. Olson, a weathered, blunt-spoken farmer from Humboldt who is a director of the state Rural Electrification Association, was talking about impeaching President Nixon, and he was talking to Representative Wiley Mayne, the four-term Republican Congressman who represents the sprawling, largely rural Sixth District of northwestern Iowa.

Mr. Mayne is a member of the House Judiciary Committee, which will have the first vote on whether Richard M. Nixon is to become the second President in history to be indicted by the House of Representatives and tried by the Senate.

This week, Mr. Mayne was home in his district, spinning through foot-deep snows and temperatures that hit 31 degrees below zero to listen to his constituents.

Meetings With Voters

In the last three days, at luncheons and dinner meetings in drafty dining halls, in question-and-answer sessions with college students, in smaller, more intimate “office hours” he held in courthouse committee rooms to receive voters from the district, Mr. Mayne heard about impeachment from Mr. Olson and many others.

Wherever he went, he heard about impeachment. It was seldom the first question asked. The energy shortage (or whether there really is one) usually came first. But at every gathering except the one with

This is the first of a number of articles, which will appear during the Congressional recess, describing what members of Congress are hearing from their constituents on major issues — primarily impeachment — as they travel their home districts.

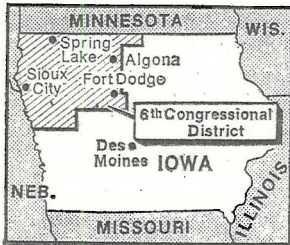
his farm advisory committee the question was eventually raised, and he was asked either how he would vote, what the impeachment procedures were, or what people in the Sixth District wanted him to do.

A crew-cut, bitterly assertive veteran at a college dinner in Algona said, “I can forgive Nixon for lining his pockets but not for running his country and his party into the ditch. But I think it’s strictly up to Congress to decide on impeachment. If you don’t know what to do, God help us.”



The New York Times

Wiley Mayne, Republican Representative of Iowa.



The New York Times/Jan. 11, 1974

voice in with those demanding impeachment. It’s a question of honesty, Mr. Mayne. Every time Nixon goes on TV, it’s a laughing stock. I’m not saying this to you as a political thing. I’m saying it for the good of this country.”

Howard Woolery, a bearded veteran attending night classes at the Iowa Lakes Community College branch in Algona: “I can’t say whether it would do any good to impeach him. I ask you, what would we get different? Maybe the President should be left where he is until he atones for his wrong.”

‘A Frightening Thought’

Walter Stevens, managing editor of The Fort Dodge Messenger: “I think people here are worried about the disruption of impeachment, or even resignation. They think the President has been badly crippled by Watergate and many of them are very disillusioned with him. But impeachment is a frightening thought around here.”

A student at the Iowa Lakes Community College branch in Estherville, wearing a fur-trimmed parka in the college auditorium and still snuffling from the breath-taking morning cold: “We wonder if the impeachment proceedings are real or just a show. You talk about constitutional grounds and we wonder if you are not making them too narrow and if impeachment isn’t the appropriate answer for wrongful, if not necessarily illegal, actions.”

A woman student at the same meeting: “How are you going to get the facts if the tapes and other records disappear or are destroyed? What can we believe now?”

Judgment Trusted

A farmer in Spencer who serves on Mr. Mayne’s own farm advisory committee: “Watergate and impeachment are not as important to us right now as gasoline and chemical fertilizer are. But if Wiley listens to the evidence and he decides to vote for impeachment, he’ll be supported in that.”

Mrs. Alice Mendenhall, Republican chairman of Dickinson County in Spirit Lake: “As

far as Dickinson County is concerned, I think people trust Wiley’s judgment. They aren’t pushing him for impeachment. But if he decides to vote ‘Yes’ they’ll support him. I hope they will still support him if he votes ‘No.’”

Mrs. Alice Martin, wife of a veteran and a student herself at the community college in Algona: “If he votes for impeachment, it certainly will not hurt him around here. If he votes against, well, I’m not so sure about that.”

Mr. Mayne, 56 years old, is a trim, graying, self-assured conservative who is quickly recognized in many parts of his district. He graduated from Harvard University and the University of Iowa Law School, has practiced law in northwestern Iowa for 20 years and is a past president of the Iowa Bar Association.

He won easily over Democratic opponents in 1968 and 1970. But in 1972 his district was enlarged to include Democratic Fort Dodge, and he barely got 52 per cent of the district vote against a young Spirit Lake manufacturer, who is expected to challenge him again this fall.

Not a Burning Issue

“I have not found impeachment to be a burning issue,” Mr. Mayne said. “You can tell from the questions that the first concern around here is more immediate and tangible. It is whether we are going to have enough gasoline, whether there will be enough fuel oil if this weather continues, and why these people are having to pay twice as much as last year for propane to heat their houses and so on. But obviously people here are quite aware that impeachment is a possibility and that I am in a position to have to face it soon and publicly.”

In answer to questions about impeachment, Mr. Mayne has had roughly the same reply each time. He told his questioners:

“I find that when the subject is raised, people are sharply split. Some want him impeached straightaway. Others want a speedy end to the question, one way or the other. My own feelings have to be that it’s my duty to follow the Constitution. I cannot and will not prejudge this until the committee has been given all the evidence available. It is not a question of the President’s popularity, but whether he should be indicted for bribery, treason, or other crimes and misdemeanors. I’ll have to decide that, and you will have to trust my judgement on it.”

Mr. Mayne carefully avoided either supporting Mr. Nixon directly or attacking him. He conceded to several audiences that he was well aware that Watergate was going to have an effect on Iowa Congressional races this fall.

“There are a lot of people in this state whose opinions I value greatly, judges and lawyers I’ve known professionally,” Mr. Mayne told an acquaintance as they rode through a frigid Iowa night.

“They’re watching me closely on this question. It’s not a matter of ‘voting right’ on it. I’ll be coming back to live and work in Iowa again one day, and I’ll be judged on whether I vote on this matter as the Constitution directs.

“I’ve never supported Nixon 100 per cent, nor will I ever do so. If the evidence is there to convince me, I will vote to impeach him. It is not an easy matter.”