

Republicans Act to Delay Hearing on Impeachment

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 15—Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee are seeking to delay or cancel a public hearing set for next week to discuss the fundamental issue of what constitutes an impeachable offense.

Republican members who attended a party caucus late yesterday said that they had agreed to ask the committee's chairman, Peter W. Rodino Jr., a New Jersey Democrat, to delay or cancel the Feb. 21 meeting because they said it would serve no useful purpose.

Sources familiar with the interparty struggle on the impeachment inquiry report that Republican members are concerned that a public airing of the question of impeachable offenses will lock them into fixed positions on impeachment. Some observers believe that the research will show a strong historical bias in favor of holding a public official accountable for acts other than criminally indictable offenses.

One Republican member privately voiced concern that a public hearing on the question might be used by the Democratic majority to put the committee on record.

An Educational Process

Mr. Rodino was unavailable for comment, but staff members indicated that he would be reluctant to cancel the hearing because he looked on it as an educational process to help the public to understand the nature of impeachment. There are indications that

some Republican members of the committee are interested in having time to develop what would be a counterbrief to support their argument that the President can be impeached only for the commission of indictable acts.

Representative Edward Hutchinson, Republican of Michigan who is the ranking minority member of the committee, transmitted the minority views to Mr. Rodino's staff today.

"I don't know why there is any need for a hearing at all," Mr. Hutchinson said today. "Every member will assess the question as he sees fit and utilize it [the staff report on impeachable offenses] in any way he feels necessary."

A Republican staff member said that Mr. Hutchinson had told Mr. Rodino's staff that he "sees no useful purpose to having such a meeting at all, but if there is to be one, the members should be given more time to study it before the hearing."

Plans now call for the staff research document to be given to members next Wednesday, with the public hearing scheduled for the following day.

The decision to ask for a change in the schedule came shortly after members of the Judiciary Committee were told in private session yesterday that White House attorneys would try to treat the inquiry as an adversary situation in which they could inject their own arguments on major procedural questions.