

Rodino Unit Role Urged For St. Clair

United Press International

White House lawyers should be permitted to observe and cross-examine witnesses while they are being questioned by the House Judiciary Committee in an investigation of possible grounds for impeachment of President Nixon, the committee's ranking Republican said yesterday.

"I think that privilege should be accorded if they request it," Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.) said. He added that James D. St. Clair, Mr. Nixon's top legal adviser, specifically should be allowed to do the cross-examining.

But Hutchinson emphasized that the subject of possible White House legal attendance during interrogation sessions "has not been decided by the committee and I don't know how the committee is going to resolve it."

Hutchinson appeared on "Face the Nation" (CBS-WTOP).

He was interviewed following the release Thursday of a lengthy study by the committee staff which concluded that criminal acts are not a necessary ingredient in an impeachment proceeding. A Justice Department study made public Friday, took a more restrictive view on what constitutes an impeachable offense.

Hutchinson said the committee staff report is not binding. "I'm sure that no member of the Judiciary Committee would feel that he would at all be bound by the decision of lawyers on the staff," he said.

"The reason that we assembled that report was for the staff to assemble the facts. But it is the function of the committee and of the staff to draw conclusions from those facts."

Hutchinson, who rejected the report's conclusions immediately after it was issued, repeated his stand that he would support any request for White House tapes and documents so long as the material is "relevant" to the investigation.

If the material is considered to be important to the investigation, he said he believes "the president does have a duty to turn those things over to the committee."

"The President has a right to protest his branch of government from improper demands on the part of either of the other two branches of government," he said.

But he added that Congress has the constitutional power of impeachment to uphold "which is a grand inquest of the nation."

"... In that role the House of Representatives as the grand inquisitor certainly does have a right, I believe, to relevant information touching upon possible impeachable actions of the President," Hutchinson said.

The Michigan lawmaker summed up his views by saying: "Impeachment is something that will put the country through a terrible trauma and something that should be avoided if at all possible."