



# Nixon Defines Issue For Impeachment

**Joseph Kraft**

**P**RESIDENT NIXON last week was working on public opinion and in the courts to avert impeachment by the Congress. But in the process he defined one explicit issue — participation in a conspiracy to obstruct justice — on which impeachment seems more and more likely. And he ended the week on the wrong end of a slippery slope in the courts and the Congress.

The message the President wanted to get across was that he was innocent of wrongdoing and was cooperating fully with the impeachment inquiry being conducted for the House of Representatives by its Judiciary Committee. That message was first delivered by White House counsel James St. Clair in the court of federal judge John Sirica. The occasion was a hearing as to whether material given to the judge by the grand jury, along with seven indictments of Nixon aides on obstruction of justice charges, should be passed on to the Judiciary Committee.

★ ★ ★

**S**T. CLAIR said the White House had no view on that issue. He then indicated that Mr. Nixon would turn over to the Judiciary Committee all the material that he had given the special prosecutor Leon Jaworski. Mr. Nixon himself repeated that message at a press conference called that evening for prime TV viewing time.

In response to the very first question, he said he would turn over to the Judiciary Committee "a total of 19 tapes, over 700 documents and enough material that Mr. Jaworski was able to say that . . . the

grand jury had all the information that it needed in order to bring to a conclusion its Watergate investigation."

Unfortunately for Mr. Nixon, the second question — and several thereafter — dealt with his role in the conspiracy to obstruct justice charged in the grand jury indictment. Mr. Nixon acknowledged that he had participated in a White House meeting last March 21 with former aides John Dean and H. R. Haldeman, at which Dean laid bare the details of a million-dollar project for hushing up the original Watergate burglars.

★ ★ ★

**M**R. NIXON said that "we examined all the options at great length during our discussions." "I pointed out," he continued, "that raising the money, paying the money, was something that could be done . . . but that was clearly linked to clemency . . . I then said that to pay clemency (sic) was wrong."

One clear inference from what Mr. Nixon said was that he went along with the hush money proposal and only balked at clemency. But he insisted that the objection to clemency included the whole proposal. That issue has now emerged as central to the impeachment question. For Mr. Nixon himself acknowledged that if he had participated in the conspiracy to pay hush money he would have committed "a serious crime . . . an impeachable offense."

Access to evidence as to exactly what he did do is now the subject of argument in the courts and the Congress.