

Judiciary Chiefs Stand Together On Data Requests

By Richard L. Lyons
Washington Post Staff Writer

The chairman and senior Republican of the House Judiciary Committee stood together yesterday in insisting that requests for White House materials for their impeachment inquiry are reasonable and relevant and must be complied with.

Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) and Rep. Edward

Hutchinson (R-Mich.) called a news conference to counter a barrage of White House complaints that the committee is on a fishing expedition in its search for evidence as to whether Mr. Nixon should be impeached.

It was an attempt to take the committee's case to the country and to signal the White House that the committee is united in demanding production of pertinent information.

The immediate problem involves a request made Feb. 25, to which the White House has not responded, for 41 or 42 taped presidential conversations concerning the cover-up of the Watergate burglary.

Rodino said the committee has been directed by the House to make a thorough inquiry and "we believe that these conversations are necessary to a full and complete explanation of the events . . . in connection with the so-called Watergate cover-up and the President's relation with it . . . We expect full cooperation from all persons. The Constitution permits nothing less."

Hutchinson insisted that the committee is not engaged in a "fishing expedition," as White House spokesmen from the President on down have suggested. The requests made by the committee's special counsel, John Doar, were "very reasonable and relevant" to the Watergate cover-up, and the White House should be "totally cooperative," Hutchinson said.

James D. St. Clair, the President's defense lawyer, and others have said the committee should in fairness, define impeachable offenses and give the President a list of charges against him before proceeding further.

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Rodino and Hutchinson both opposed defining impeachable offenses, on grounds that each congressman must make this decision himself. Hutchinson said it would be "time-consuming and futile."

Hutchinson added that the committee could not supply a list of charges because "There are no charges. We hope we will find none. We are simply making an inquiry."

Hutchinson seemed to agree with the White House suggestions that the committee should limit its inquiry to Watergate matters. He called this the "only legitimate" area for inquiry. Rodino disagreed, saying that other matters under staff study, such as the President's tax returns and illegal campaign contributions, are "proper areas for inquiry."

Rodino said the committee will set no deadline for White House compliance with the requests for tapes. But he added that "if the committee feels there is an absolute refusal" to comply, "I am sure it will

exercise the power of subpoena."

Hutchinson said, however, that the committee "has a responsibility" to see to it that a confrontation does not occur between the committee and the White House. "Confrontation is the end of the road," he said. "There is no solution to confrontation." This could occur if the White House defied a committee subpoena.

Rodino agreed in general, but added that confrontation would occur only if there is "an absolute refusal to cooperate in what we think is our constitutional duty."

Committee Democrats met yesterday morning and agreed, on Doar's recommendation, to delay issuing a subpoena for the White House materials at least until St. Clair sends back a specific answer on whether the tapes will be delivered or withheld.

The committee is also waiting to learn whether U.S. District Court Chief Judge John J. Sirica will give it a sealed briefcase given him by the Watergate grand jury contain-