

ST. CLAIR REPORTED SEEKING G.O.P. AID

He Has Been Meeting With Key Congressmen on the Refusal to Supply Data

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WASHINGTON, March 19—President Nixon's special Watergate counsel, James D. St. Clair, has been meeting privately on Capitol Hill with key Republicans in an apparent effort to win support for President Nixon's refusal to give Watergate evidence to the House Judiciary Committee.

Senator Bill Brock, Republican of Tennessee, disclosed late today that Mr. St. Clair had met earlier today with a group of Congressmen to discuss the impasse over the evidence.

The House Republican leader, Representative John J. Rhodes of Arizona, confirmed in a telephone interview today that Mr. St. Clair went to Mr. Rhodes's office last Wednesday to brief Vice President Ford and himself on the same matter.

Mr. Brock said that the discussion he had taken part in revolved around concern about "cooperation with the committee," but he declined to say who else had been involved or in whose office the meeting had taken place.

Mr. Rhodes said that the meeting last week in his office also involved Bryce N. Harlow, a counselor to the President. According to Mr. Rhodes, the President's lawyer showed the other participants a copy of the Feb. 25 letter in which John M. Doar, the special counsel to the House Judiciary Committee, requested a number of tape recordings and documents from the White House for use in the impeachment inquiry.

Two days after the meeting, Vice President Ford charged at a news conference in Charleston, S. C., that the Judiciary Committee lawyers were at-

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tempting to "dictate proceedings" of the impeachment inquiry and urged the committee members to "start corraling the staff."

An attempt to obtain comment this evening from Mr. St. Clair was unsuccessful. The White House telephone operator said that he had gone for the day.

'A Briefing Session'

Mr. Rhodes characterized the meeting as "sort of a briefing session" for the Vice President and himself. He said that he saw nothing improper in the President's lawyer discussing the letter—which had been sent to the White House as a confidential document—with individuals outside the impeachment inquiry.

But Mr. Rhodes said that he had been led by the meeting with Mr. St. Clair to "reduce my estimate of the ability of the committee staff."

The House Republican leader said that the letter seemed to be "fuzzy" in specifying the information sought from the White House and that it "could have been taken"—as the White House was then trying to suggest—"as a preamble to a fishing expedition."

According to Mr. Rhodes, the White House appeared to be uncertain at the time of the meeting as to what Mr. Doar had in mind in asking for de-

tails about how White House files were indexed and whether members of the inquiry staff might examine White House files to determine which were relevant to their investigation.

But Mr. Doar and Albert E. Jenner Jr., the senior Republican counsel to the committee, both said last week that they clarified their request on Monday, March 11—two days before Mr. St. Clair went to Mr. Rhodes's office.

Mr. Rhodes said today that he understood that the request had been clarified after his meeting with Mr. St. Clair.

The meeting, thus, appeared to have been part of an attempt by the White House to generate opposition to the Judiciary Committee's insistence on access to the tape recordings and other Watergate evidence being withheld by the President.

Mr. Rhodes said, however, that he could not remember if the idea for the meeting had come from his office or the White House. He said that as best he could recall it, he had told Mr. Ford it might be advisable to discuss the request for evidence with Mr. St. Clair, that the meeting had been arranged and that he had then notified Mr. Ford of it.

Mr. Rhodes said he saw nothing wrong in meeting with Mr. Nixon's attorney at the same time that he was in frequent contact with Republican members of the Judiciary Committee.

"The members are not being briefed at all" on what the inquiry staff is doing, Mr. Rhodes said. "I'm telling them more than they're telling me."