

Lawyer for SEChronicle Nixon Gets Impeach Role

Washington

The House Judiciary Committee approved rules yesterday that will give White House lawyer James D. St. Clair an active role in protecting President Nixon's interest during impeachment hearings.

The committee also agreed to permit live television coverage of some of its hearings.

The hearings will begin next Wednesday or Thursday, but the first several days will be closed to the public for presentation of confidential evidence.

Under rules of procedure approved by the committee, St. Clair, a skilled courtroom practitioner, will be permitted to question witnesses, suggest additional witnesses, address the committee and raise objections to questions posed by others, including members of Congress.

Republicans sought to enhance St. Clair's role, but were defeated.

For example, a 23-to-15 vote rejected a Republican motion to make it explicitly clear St. Clair could both "examine and cross-

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examine" witnesses. Instead, the committee said merely he could "question" witnesses and left further interpretation of what that meant to the chairman.

The hearings will be held to determine whether the committee believes there are grounds to impeach the President.

Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (Dem-N.J.) will retain the power to overrule St. Clair, much as a judge can rule on the objections of a lawyer in a trial.

Liberal Democrats on the committee expressed misgivings about giving St.

Clair such a big role. Permitting him to object at every point "could turn these proceedings into a circus," said Representative Elizabeth Holtzman (Dem-N.Y.).

But Rodino backed the rules in an apparent effort to carry along substantial Republican support as the hearings begin. He wants to

avoid a final showdown vote on impeachment in which the Democratic majority lines up for impeaching Mr. Nixon and the Republican minority is united in opposition. Such a resolution would encounter tough going on the House floor.

Joining Rodino was Representative Robert F. Drinan

(Dem-Mass.), usually an aggressive advocate of Mr. Nixon's speedy impeachment and one of the most liberal of the 38 members.

"It is better to let him become the 39th member of the committee than to deny him his procedural rights," Drinan said of St. Clair.

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