

Party Vote on Impeachment

By Lou Cannon

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A renewed White House strategy of depicting impeachment of President Nixon as a partisan issue emerged yesterday in the wake of a near-party-line vote on the House Judiciary Committee.

White House Counselor Dean Burch, who last week received a cool reception from the Republican National Committee when he asserted that the President's and the party's fortunes are "indistinguishable," said he now thinks most Republicans will rally to Mr. Nixon's support.

Burch was obviously heartened by a Wednesday night vote of the Judiciary Committee, where Rep. William Cohen of Maine was the only Republican to vote with the majority's declaration that Mr. Nixon had failed to comply with a committee subpoena.

The committee wanted the White House to turn over actual tape recordings of Mr. Nixon's Watergate-related conversations rather than the edited transcripts that were provided.

Asked if the President is on "much more solid ground politically" if the committee continues to take nearly partisan votes, Burch replied:

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"Sure, I think it follows, obviously."

The White House attempted to coordinate closely its release of the edited transcripts with congressional Republicans and also to assess GOP sentiment throughout the country. "By and large," Burch said, this reaction has been positive.

The White House was buoyed yesterday by the statement of Vice President Gerald R. Ford that he is "convinced beyond any doubt" that Mr. Nixon is innocent of any wrongdoing.

However, Ford also said that he believes Mr. Nixon "could have been more forceful" in trying to find out what happened at Watergate.

"I agree the March 21 conversation on hush money was not as clear as the President would like if he could write the scripts," Ford said on the NBC "Today" program. "But the President later told every member of the White House they should come clean and go down to the grand jury and tell the truth."

Both Burch and James P. St. Clair, the President's Watergate counsel, have indicated that they expect some criticism of Mr. Nixon for his Watergate-related conduct. The President, in his address to the nation Monday night, said there were portions of the tran-

scripts that would expose him to embarrassment and ridicule.

But the White House is resting its hopes on the view expressed yesterday by Ford whatever else they may re- that Mr. Nixon's actions, flect, do not constitute impeachable offenses.

Burch indicated that the White House also is ready to resume its campaign of pressing for a speedy vote on the impeachment issue. He said the House should complete its action on the impeachment resolution o later than mid-June.

This theme is expected to be a part of the presidential message when Mr. Nixon travels to Phoenix today for a Republican Party rally in his honor.

Arizona Republicans are staging a reception for the President and Mrs. Nixon and they expect 16,000 persons to be on hand in the Phoenix Coliseum. Tickets are being distributed free in an attempt to fill the hall by state Republican leaders.

Burch said the original invitation for the meeting came from Arizona Gov. John R. Williams and that all GOP members of the Arizona congressional delegation will participate.

House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes and Sen. Barry M. Goldwater are expected to speak, and Governor Williams is scheduled to introduce the President. A spokesman in Rhodes' office

emphasized that Rhodes did not extend the invitation.

A White House official described the meeting as a "citizens' rally."

Democrats, who are holding a Western states conference in Phoenix at the same time, will respond to the President with a speech by the only Democrat in the Arizona congressional delegation, Rep. Morris K. Udall.

Mr. Nixon is to spend tonight in Phoenix and fly to Spokane Saturday, where he is to open Expo '74. He is to return to Washington late Saturday.

Despite the new White House push for a quick decision on the impeachment issue, there were some signs of compromise on the original insistence of President Nixon that only Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) and ranking minority member Edward Hutchinson (R-N.J.) be allowed to verify the transcripts released by the White House.

Ford said that committee investigators also ought to be allowed to verify the transcripts, and Burch, without conceding any change in the President's position, said he did not rule this out.

Neither Ford nor Burch argued with the assertion of House Judiciary Committee special counsel John Doar that the transcripts are inaccurate in places.