

Washington Wire

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NIXON SEARCHES for a coherent strategy for clinging to office.

He hopes for a break, as the House moves toward impeachment. There is almost no support in Congress for his refusal to surrender additional evidence; his stand is likely to cost him vital Republican votes. His firm refusal to quit office, though convincingly stated, probably won't stop another and stronger surge of GOP resignation pressure if the House votes to impeach—which seems almost certain.

Presidential maneuvers appear inadequate against the dimensions of Nixon's political and legal woes. But White House aides indicate he will continue to squire conservative Congressmen aboard the yacht Sequoia, hold showy business meetings with Cabinet officers, speak before friendly audiences. At best, such moves apparently can only slow the erosion of Nixon's Capitol Hill strength, not rebuild support.

The new Nixon PR offensive already is hurt by yesterday's Kleindienst guilty plea, which refocuses attention on presidential involvement in the ITT case, as well as by disclosure of Nixon schemes to punish the Washington Post.

RODINO'S PANEL will get more pressure to speed its impeachment inquiry.

Worried Republican politicians press harder for rapid committee action. Some hope that the hearings will produce much more damaging evidence, forcing Nixon to resign and enabling them to avoid a dangerous vote on impeachment or conviction; all are anxious to get a Watergate vote behind them well before the November election. Democrats press for speed, too, fearful of charges of footdragging that could hurt them with voters.

To quicken the hearings, Republican Judiciary members may drop demands that witnesses be called; any grants of immunity could take weeks to process. Still, the potential for delay remains great. White House resistance to supplying further evidence could slow the hearings. Chairman Rodino schedules only three hearings a week.

Public meetings may start next week. They promise to make boring TV, with counsels Doar and Jenner reading summaries of the evidence.

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