

Rodino Says Nixon Inquiry Cannot Meet Its Deadline

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WASHINGTON, July 9—The House Judiciary Committee, plodding through apparently inconclusive questioning of witnesses at closed hearings, will be unable to meet its tentative deadline for completing the impeachment inquiry, the committee chairman said today.

The chairman, Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, said "any slippage" in the effort to conclude the investigation of President Nixon's conduct was attributable to a refusal by the House to curtail questioning of witnesses by committee members and to Mr. Rodino's reluctant agreement to call all of the witnesses proposed by the White House.

However, Mr. Rodino said that he planned to delay the start of formal committee debate by several days to conduct "seminars" at which the inquiry staff might draw the attention of the panel members to the most important items of evidence.

Timetable Discussed

Mr. Rodino discussed the timetable for the inquiry during a break today in the committee's examination of William O. Bittman, the former defense attorney for E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the convicted Watergate conspirators. Mr. Bittman reportedly told the committee that he would never have joined in the clandestine transfer of funds from the President's 1972 re-election committee to Mr. Hunt if he had thought the money was meant to silence Mr. Hunt.

The Judiciary Committee had planned to complete its examination of witnesses by Friday, begin debate on possible articles of impeachment next Monday and decide on July 22 whether to recommend that Mr. Nixon be impeached.

Mr. Rodino said today that the examination of witnesses was proceeding slowly, that it could probably not be completed before sometime next week and that, as a consequence, the committee was unlikely to reach a formal decision before July 29.

Republicans and Democrats on the committee concurred

with the chairman's evident conclusion that witnesses questioned so far had added little to the inquiry record.

"I consider this, frankly, kind of a blah presentation," said Representative George E. Danielson, Democrat of California. Representative David W. Dennis, Republican of Indiana, said that Mr. Bittman had not "added anything new we haven't already more or less known about."

Earlier Witnesses

Earlier, the committee consensus was the same about previous inquiry witnesses—Paul L. O'Brien, a former lawyer for the re-election committee; Frederick C. LaRue, a former official of the re-election campaign who had served as an intermediary in alleged hush-money payments to Watergate defendants, and Alexander P. Butterfield, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration and a one-time White House aide.

All the witnesses to date, except Mr. Butterfield, were summoned at the request of James D. St. Clair, the President's chief defense counsel, in an attempt to show that Mr. Nixon had not played a direct role in an alleged hush-money payment of \$75,000 to Mr. Hunt on March 21, 1973.

Representative Charles E. Wiggins, Republican of California, said that he was still hopeful that two remaining witnesses proposed by Mr. St. Clair might clarify the hush-money issue. They are John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General, and John W. Dean 3d, the former White House legal counsel.

The committee began questioning Mr. Mitchell late today, but his testimony was not expected to touch on the central issue before he returns to the witness table tomorrow.

First Seminar Held

Mr. Rodino appeared eager to begin deliberations on the committee's voluminous record of evidence. But he said that he planned a series of seminars at which interested members could be briefed by staff lawyers. The first such meeting, involving about a dozen Demo-



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William O. Bittman, former lawyer for E. Howard Hunt Jr., testifying at impeachment inquiry. At rear are James D. St. Clair, left, and John McCahill, White House lawyers.

cratic members, was held last night.

A member of the inquiry staff said privately that the seminars were intended to point out to committee members the relevance of key elements of evi-

dence, all of which has been presented to them without any characterization.

"This whole case is facts," the aide said. "The whole thing is getting people to see the facts. It's as if you go into a

forest and look at one tree and say, 'You can't build a house out of that,' and go to another tree and say, 'You can't build a house out of that.' You might never realize you could build a house from the forest."