

# Seek Quick Trial, Friends Urge Nixon

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer



REP. SAM STEIGER  
... strong Nixon backer

Two of President Nixon's staunchest congressional supporters appealed to the White House yesterday to avert a landslide defeat in the House by directly seeking impeachment in the interests of getting a prompt trial in the Senate.

The two Republican congressmen, Sam Steiger of Arizona and Charles S. Gubser of California, told White House counselor Dean Burch that Mr. Nixon would be fortunate to receive even 100 votes after two weeks of televised impeachment hearings.

Burch was not available for comment. But another White House official said,

without elaboration, that the proposal was "under serious scrutiny."

White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. also reflected the growing recognition within the Nixon administration of the impeachment impetus now gathering within the House.

"We are not naive about the situation," Haig said after testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on National Security Council wiretaps.

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REP. CHARLES GUBSER  
... 21-year veteran

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"We keep close tabs on it without making any value judgment."

The proposal made yesterday by Gubser and Steiger has been a familiar topic of GOP cloakroom conversation in the House ever since it was first put forth five months ago by Rep. Lou Frey Jr. (R-Fla.), who no longer advocates it.

But it was primarily popular with GOP congressmen who were not principally regarded as either senior Republicans or defenders of the President.

Gubser, a 21-year-veteran of the House, and Steiger, a congressman since 1966, are not in this category. Both have strongly backed Mr. Nixon within the House, and both oppose his impeachment.

Some other congressmen were skeptical that the President would accept the idea of asking for impeachment in the interests of weakening the effect of such an action by the House.

"This idea has been floated to the White House before, and it usually sinks when it gets to the President's office," said Rep. Barber Conable (R-N.Y.). "Now it's being revived again in the hope that it will dilute the cup of hemlock we will have to drink."

But Conable said there appears to be a growing sense of reality among the President's supporters, and he did not rule out the possibility that Mr. Nixon would accept it.

"You remember that Vice President Agnew would never resign right up until the moment that he did so," Conable said.

In discussing the proposal with Burch both Gubser and Steiger stressed the impact of the television hearings of the House Judiciary Committee. Steiger said that "a stampede" was developing in the House that could impair Mr. Nixon's chances to survive a trial in the Senate.

Both congressmen said that Republican members were especially concerned about the allegations that President Nixon had misused the Internal Revenue Service in a political way.

Gubser said, however, that he was still "leaning against impeachment" because he thought the charges as framed by the Judiciary Committee were "too general in nature."

There were other signs yesterday that Mr. Nixon's position has seriously eroded in the House.

Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) emphasized that he had not reached any decision on his own impeachment stand, and said the issue should not be polarized along party lines.

In an interview with Reuter News Service, Rhodes said he was "very concerned" about the impact of impeachment on his republican colleagues, adding, "And I am concerned about the evidence against the President."

Rep. John Anderson of Illinois, leader of the House GOP conference, said that "people are milling around, floundering, trying to decide upon a course of action."

Two senators said they had been sounded out by Bryce Harlow, the President's former counselor, about Mr. Nixon's prospects in a trial.

The official White House view—usually enunciated by press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler—is that Mr. Nixon has nothing to worry about in the Senate because impeachment will be defeated in the House.

This view has scant, if any, support in the House.

One Republican spoke of the "measure of desperation" in the GOP cloakroom. Others talked of a vote including far more than the 50 Republicans who are supposed to be pro-impeachment. At the round table in the House dining room, where GOP members frequently eat a \$20 bet was made that Mr. Nixon would not receive even 100 votes in the House.

Democrats also expressed awareness of the discomfiture of their Republican colleagues over having a recorded vote on impeachment.

"I'm sure there's a lot of people who would like to take the impeachment vote by voice vote," said House Majority Leader Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill (R-Mass.) "but it isn't going to happen."

Not all Republicans were looking for a way out, however. Several said the impeachment process has to run its course regardless of consequences, and actively opposed proposals to forestall a vote on the merits.

"I totally oppose the con-

cept (of Mr. Nixon asking for a pro-impeachment vote)," said Rep. William Ketchum of California. "It would be the biggest copout in town."

Ketchum said that "The people think pretty poorly of Congress right now, and that would absolutely devastate them." He said he was not decided how he will vote on the impeachment issue.

Frey, the original advocate of the proposal, said, "It is now too late for the plan... it does not make good sense now."

He said he proposed it five months ago in the hope of quickly getting the impeachment issue to the more "judicial atmosphere" of the Senate.

In the maneuvering surrounding the impeachment issue Burch emerged as the leading White House negotiator with the House.

Rep. Charles Wiggins (R-Calif.), the President's most effective defender on the House Judiciary Committee said he was called by Burch Monday, the day the second impeachment article cleared the committee by a 28-to-10 vote.

Wiggins told the Associated Press that Burch asked his opinion about whether it would "be in the President's best interest" to get the Judiciary Committee's action over with quickly. Wiggins said he thought it would be.