Showdown on the April Tapes The last door open to the White

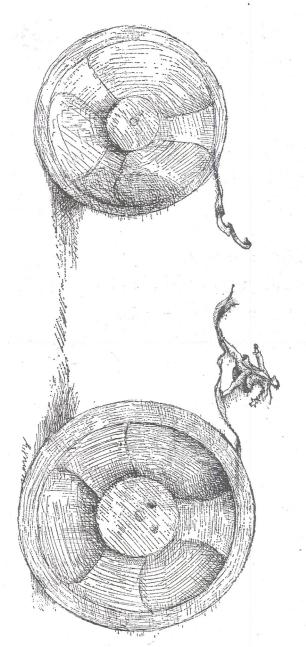
unavoidable moment of truth Thursior Republicans and Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee, posing an ing presidential tapes of April 1973 has been slammed shut in advance by sen-House for painless noncompliance with the congressional subpoenas demand-

Give the committee an edited version the subpoenaed April tapes actually security" and "irrelevant" material. Siof the April tapes, omitting "national White House have suggested not all seemed headed toward this approach: multaneously, veiled hints from the The White House late last week

belief and outrage from both Republi-But an overwhelming majority on the Judiciary Committee simply will cans and Democrats. missing tapes would be greeted by disand counsel working with Nixon debipartisan senior committee members ery tape by the subpoena's Thursday not buy this. They want each and evfense lawer James St. Clair. Claims of "irrelevant" material be resolved by due-date. They will insist that ques-"national security" and

obeying the subpoena. That dilemma publican suspicions still higher by disthat's the way it is. win it, but adds that if he doesn't, well, must be played out and thinks he will fatalistic. Mr. Nixon knows the game a private presidential mood ever more may encourage what aides describe as must surrender the tapes or raise Re-Thus, the showdown: Mr. Nixon

H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman tions hold the key to the game. Having been warned by the Justice Departhearings raised the possibility that the might be criminally prosecuted and ment April 15 that presidential aides mid-April 1973 presidential conversamight answer fateful questions: Was should be fired, the President disre-garded the advice. Instead, he conferthis just bad judgment by Mr. Nixon? versations whose recorded contents red with them in frequent, Last summer's Senate Watergate long con-



By Geoffrey Moss

cover-up? Or was he involved in the Watergate

tions during this crucial period. tape at 9:30 Sunday morning, April 15. tions are lost forever. But assuming the machine was replen-House says the recorder ran out of ished Monday, there were many other Nixon-Haldeman-Ehrlichman conversa-Some potentially revealing conversa-The White

conversations between April 14 and April 17, 1973. Similarly, St. Clair comchary about their release. Special Pros-Clair precisely what was wanted). plained repeatedly that Judiciary Comecutor Leon Jaworski's requests were mittee Counsel John Doar's request ignored, and he has subpoenaed 13 vague (though Doar privately told St for April 14-17 conversations was too The President has been particularly

posed omitting the April tapes from considered the historic subpoena, St the subpoena. A party-line vote defeated his amendment. that was rejected, staunch quested-except the April tapes. After Clair offered Doar all material re-Just before the Judiciary Committee David Dennis of Indiana pro-Nixonite

> publicans supporting nonrelease of the mittee down partisan lines with Resucceeded splitting the Judiciary Com-House prompting, Latta proposed another amendment, specifically listing tee's most intransigent Nixonite: Rep each April 14-17 presidential conversa-Delbert Latta of Ohio. Without White ironically transformed by the commit-April tapes. But this was suddenly and White House strategy had seemingly

of the April tapes. licans, Latta included, for acquisition another party-line vote, the partisan amendment; if Latta's proposal lost on poena but locked in committee Repuban overwhelming vote for the subamendment. That not only produced Jersey, shrewdly accepted the Latta would be exposed. But the Democratic rapacity of the Democratic Nixon by the defeat of the Dennis partisan advantage gained for Mr. believe Latta wanted to nail down the chairman, Rep. Peter Rodino of New Some suspicious committee members majority

accusing Judiciary Committee Demo-This destroyed Nixonian tactics of

> ally—editing the tapes. St. Clair jointly—not St. Clair unilaterof Judiciary Committee lawyers and driving a U-Haul truck to the White crats of seeking a fishing license or Leader John Rhodes endorses the idea House. Moreover, House Republican

understand that the Latta amendment eral editing. Still less acceptable would sional Republicans could accept unilatended any possibility that congresdemand: Why did the President not gested by one senior presidential aide, be a sudden revelation privately sugsay so in the first place? Even loyal that more April tapes are nonexistent. The White House does not seem to Republicans would

ing the President's fate. ander Haig. If past practice is folcircle is wrestling with the subpoena: The President, St. Clair, Counsel J. lowed, the reply will come at the elev-Fred Buzhardt and Chief of Staff Alexgo farther than all the others in decid enth hour. But this one decision could As usual, a tiny White House inner

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