

# Impeachment--The Inside Fighting

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## Washington

Despite White House confidence it will defeat impeachment on the floor of the House of Representatives, veteran Washington bureaucrats adept at sniffing the wind expect the issue to go to the Senate for resolution.

One group has already drawn up a list of 34 senators expected to support the President. And it is focusing lobbying activities on this "blocking third"—a two-thirds Senate vote is needed for conviction—to bring pressure on the White House in its behalf in matters unrelated to Watergate.

The list consists of 23 Republicans, one independent and ten Democrats. All the Democrats are Southerners except two from a Far West state.

The White House view that it will prevail in the House

as a whole is rooted in the belief that the House Judiciary Committee staff has not turned up enough evidence so far to support articles of impeachment, despite persistent news reports that it has "explosive" material against the President.

One high presidential aide maintained that this absence of evidence, as he called it, drove the committee staff into provoking a subpoena by the committee Thursday in hopes of precipitating a confrontation with the White House.

The subpoena, if not honored, could itself become the basis of an impeachment charge.

The White House has clearly targeted the committee staff as the enemy now. Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler has all but accused committee counsel John Doar of deliberately distorting the President's position before the committee during the subpoena debate.

At that hearing, Doar said the White House would pro-

vide four items asked by the committee (comprising six of the 42 taped conversations demanded) "only if the subpoena was not issued." The White House insists the offer

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was not conditional and that Doar knew it.

"They just wanted a confrontation" said one presidential aide later. "We even tried to work out a compromise through (Vice President) Jerry Ford to show our good intention."

That last-minute attempt failed to get from the White House its offer in writing, as Republican supporters of the President wanted. Why such a document could not have been produced, if the White House wanted to avoid the subpoena as badly as it claimed later, is difficult to understand.

One official maintained that in any case, there is little difference between a subpoena and a simple letter from the committee, in that neither party will go to the law courts to argue its case. "The decision on whether our response will be adequate or not will be a political judgment" the presidential aide said.

There is a qualitative difference between the two kinds of communications, nonetheless. Congress is more likely to vote contempt against anyone who ignores

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a subpoena, particularly in an impeachment inquiry, while administrations have long ignored simple letters from committees asking for information, without Congress taking any action.

The White House appears to view a vote for impeachment by the Judiciary Committee as inevitable, but officials now say they will win

the battle on the floor of the full House where any committee recommendation will go.

Without proof of criminal acts by Mr. Nixon, one White House official claimed, few Republicans will desert him. "Very few of them won by more than ten per cent in the last election, say 55 to 45, and they have to know that voting for impeachment this year will cost them at least that margin from their conservative Republican constituents" one presidential counselor said.

This view was held despite the whopping 33-to-3 majority for the subpoena in the House Judiciary Committee Thursday. The three negative votes were from Republicans. Two more Republicans were absent at the time of the vote, but the other 12 GOP members of the committee voted for the subpoena.

The "full and complete statement" from the President, promised before the end of the Easter recess when the subpoena is answerable, now looms as the next major defense document from the White House in the conflict.

It is expected to be presented, along with supporting material from the Watergate tapes, about April 22 or 23, just before the due date of the subpoena on April 25.

Ziegler said it will show the President's actions were exactly as he described them over the past year, and thus, will prove his ultimate innocence to "the full House of Representatives."

Presidential aides went further in private, contending that the statement will present "incontrovertible" proof of the President's innocence. This will be done "in detail and in character," one aide said. He declined to explain precisely what he meant by those words, however.

While the White House maintains optimism on the House vote, some seasoned

professional bureaucrats in Washington whose success has depended primarily on reading accurately the sentiment in Congress, see the signs as pointing to the Senate as the ultimate arbitrator in the impeachment case.

Acting on their conclusion, they have identified the 34 most likely votes against impeachment and are working on them to influence the White House in their favor. Requests from such men, it is felt by the astute bureaucrats, will be harder for the White House to refuse than if a similar request came from other Senators.

William E. Timmons, the White House's congressional liaison chief, said no congressmen had yet approached him offering to trade an impeachment vote for a favor. It is doubtful that any congressman would put it so blatantly. But beyond that, at least two members of the House have approached White House officials recently with board hints that their vote can be had in return for presidential support of their pet projects, according to knowledgeable administration sources.