

Democratic National Chairman Asserts the House Will Impeach

7-17-74

NY

By R. W. APPLE Jr.

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 16 — Robert S. Strauss, the Democratic National Chairman, predicted today that the House of Representatives would vote to impeach President Nixon because of "devastating and overwhelming" evidence against him.

Mr. Strauss, who issued his forecast at a breakfast meeting with a group of reporters, said he reached his conclusions about the evidence last weekend, when he read at his Texas home a substantial portion of the transcripts of White House Watergate conversations for the first time.

Heretofore, the party chairman had steadfastly refused to comment on the possibilities of impeachment because, he repeatedly said, to do would be to give the impeachment debate an "inappropriate" partisan cast.

Heretofore, the party chairman has made no public comment on the possibilities of impeachment because, as he has repeatedly said, to do so would be to give the impeachment debate an "inappropriate" partisan cast.

He said today that he had changed his attitude because of reading the transcripts, not because he had taken a head count or because of new political considerations.

Action Not Urged

In addition he was careful not to urge Democratic House members to support impeachment, even though he said that any "reasonable man" would, given the evidence. And he refused to discuss in any way what the Senate might do if the House voted for impeachment.

Mr. Strauss's comments seem

likely, nonetheless, to do precisely what he has said he feared in the past: Increase Congressional polarization on impeachment. The process already appears well advanced, partly because of White House efforts to portray the impeachment drive as a Democratic vendetta.

Representative Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., Democrat of Massachusetts, the House majority leader, has been saying for a month that his count indicates that impeachment will be approved in the House by at least 80 votes. But most Democratic leaders and experienced lobbyists have privately contested his statements, arguing that the situation is too fluid for an accurate count.

Observers Surprised

In that context, Mr. Strauss's sudden willingness to predict the outcome surprised many political observers.

The chairman said that in his view, Mr. Nixon and his White House counsel, J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., who suffered a heart attack recently, were "still running the cover-up on an hour-by-hour, day-by-day basis."

He said that no single piece of evidence in the transcripts or in the House Judiciary Committee's summary, some of which he also read, had convinced him of Mr. Nixon's complicity in the cover-up. Rather, he said, it was "the whole montage of evidence."

"The weight of the evidence," added Mr. Strauss, a lawyer and businessman, "preponderates so heavily against the President that I would be shocked if the Judiciary Committee did not vote impeachment and surprised if the House didn't."