

Mondale Cites Grounds for Impeachment

Sen. Walter F. Mondale (D.-Minn.) said yesterday that presidential defiance of a Supreme Court order to release the disputed Watergate tapes could be grounds for impeachment.

Although he would not say whether he would vote for conviction in such a proceeding, Mondale said that if the President were to refuse any Supreme Court order to release the tapes of conversations about the Watergate scandal, it could "well be" an impeachable offense.

Mondale, who has been frequently mentioned as a contender for the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination, decried "official lawlessness" permeating the presidency and those institutions surrounding it.

Appearing on the TV program "Meet the Press" (NBC, WRC), Mondale said the disputed tapes "are not documents of official government activity. Those are discussions of a political campaign. Executive privilege doesn't apply to that." He said the President "has no right to defy" a Supreme Court ruling that the tapes be turned over.

Over the past several years, Mondale said, the presidency has become "larger than the law." "They even seem to believe they have the right to break the law," he said.

He criticized a recent statement by former Gov. John B. Connally of Texas that President Nixon could be justified in ignoring any Supreme Court decision ordering that the tapes be turned over. The American people, Mondale said, want the tapes of Watergate-related conversations released to Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and the Senate investigating committee.