

A Hint of Negotiations Over the Nixon Tapes

By David S. Brader

Washington

Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson has met twice this week with special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox in an apparent effort to negotiate a compromise that might avoid a Supreme Court showdown with President Nixon on producing the White House tape recordings.

A Justice Department spokesman, who confirmed the meetings had taken place on Monday and Tuesday, said yesterday he would not confirm or deny that was their purpose.

Today is the deadline for Mr. Nixon's attorneys to file an appeal from a Court of Appeals decision last Friday ordering the President to submit the tapes to District Judge John J. Sirica. Sirica would then decide what portions would go to the Watergate Grand Jury.

Deputy White House Press Secretary Gerald L. Warren said yesterday that Richardson had been "consulted" by the President's attorneys, who are "studying" the Appeals Court decision, but he declined repeatedly to say whether Richardson had been authorized to seek some compromise with Cox.

The Appeals Court has twice urged Mr. Nixon to work out a voluntary arrangement for making at least some of the tapes available—once before handing down its decision and again in its formal ruling.

While today is the deadline for filing a notice of appeal, legal authorities noted that a compromise could come at any time until arguments on the case are held before the Supreme Court. So far, however, Mr. Nixon's stated position has been unyielding on the question.

He has ruled out any step that would compromise the principle that confidential presidential records are not

subject to disclosure at the command of the courts.

Mr. Nixon has hinted that he might persist in that stand unless the Supreme Court handed down what he called a "definitive" judgment against him.

Yesterday, the second-ranking Republican in the Senate warned Mr. Nixon that "defiance" of the Supreme Court "would certainly raise the prospect of impeachment proceedings beginning in the House."

"I don't know what the result would be," Senate minority whip Robert P. Griffin (Rep-Mich.) told newsmen, "but the demand for action would be a great deal stronger than it is today."

Griffin said that if Mr. Nixon asked his advice on the matter, he would urge him "to work out some voluntary arrangement, as the appeals court has suggested, and get the thing behind him."

In fact, the Michigan Senator said, neither he nor any other member of the party leadership has had an opportunity to discuss the question with the President.

Griffin said it has never been discussed at the White House meetings with the congressional leaders, because "they are so large, everyone realizes it's almost



SENATOR GRIFFIN
Impeachment warning

impossible to bring up a subject that's sensitive, without it getting out."

Earlier this week, White House domestic adviser Melvin R. Laird, a close friend of Griffin's told reporters that the President's refusal to obey a Supreme Court decision on the tapes would bring an impeachment move in the House, but it would fail to win the necessary

majority.

Griffin said he was not sure Laird's optimism on the outcome was warranted. "I don't think anybody could count the votes now," he said. "You would have to await public reaction to defiance by the President. It depends on what the Supreme Court says. If it were a unanimous decision, it (the reaction) would be worse."