

Demos Agree on 'Impeach Nixon' Study in House

Washington

House Democratic leaders tentatively agreed yesterday that the House Judiciary Committee should make a preliminary investigation to determine whether there are grounds to impeach President Nixon.

This first-step decision emerged from a 3½-hour meeting of Speaker Carl Albert and the few members of the party leadership who were in town for the long Veterans Day weekend. It will be discussed further this morning at a full meeting of Democratic leaders and with the House Democratic steering committee, which is representative of party membership.

A preliminary study would be one step short of beginning formal impeachment proceedings. It would be expected to head off any serious drive for immediate House vote, without any committee consideration, on an impeachment resolution when members return to work today.

WALDIE

Representative Jerome R. Waldie (Dem-Calif.) said he will introduce a resolution calling for Mr. Nixon's impeachment on grounds that he has obstructed justice by refusing to produce tapes of his Watergate conversations, and by firing Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox for pressing for the tapes.

Waldie said he would prefer that his resolution be referred to the House Judiciary Committee for consideration, rather than be put to an immediate vote. Any member could demand an immediate up-or-down vote, but this could be headed off by a motion to refer it to committee.

At the request of Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield, the Senate Judiciary Committee will meet tomorrow morning to decide whether to conduct hearings on the firing of Cox, the resignation of Attorney General Elliot Richardson and the firing of his deputy, William Ruckelshaus.

ISSUE

Mansfield said the judiciary committee should look into the matter because Richardson had promised the Senate at the time of his confirmation that the special

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prosecutor would be given a free hand. It was because of this promise that Richardson resigned when the President asked him to fire Cox.

The Senate Special Watergate committee, which was to be in recess until October 30, scheduled an emergency executive session for tomorrow morning to discuss the latest developments.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Dem-Mass.) said evidence was building up that Cox was fired not because of the controversy over the tapes but because he was "too hot on the White House trail."

House Republicans will meet this morning to discuss the situation.

REPUBLICAN

Representative Barber Conable of New York, chairman of the House GOP re-

search committee and just about the only Republican leader talking yesterday, said he would prefer having a select committee rather than Judiciary handle the preliminary inquiry on im-

peachment. This was, in part, because of the liberal and presumably anti-Nixon lineup of the 21 Democrats on the 38-member judiciary committee, and, in part, because gearing up a select committee would give time to see whether the President's plan to release summaries of his tapes, verified by Senator John C. Stennis (Dem-Miss.), was legal and acceptable.

Conable, a moderate and independent-minded Republican, described himself as "upset and concerned" by events because "everytime we go down this chute it has tended to weaken the system and the process and add to the paralysis of government."

He called House Republicans "pretty badly disturbed" and predicted that Republican leaders would lead no move to block preliminary step toward impeachment.

Although it appeared yesterday that there is not a House majority for voting impeachment of the President, comments from conservative Republicans showed them seriously shaken by the weekend events.

"I've carried Nixon's flag faithfully for five years and it's getting awfully heavy," said Representative G. William Whitehurst (Rep-Va.).

"I'm bending over backwards to believe him," said Representative Jerry Pettis (Rep-Calif.). "I'm bending over so far backwards my fifth vertebra is about to break."

Representative Garry Brown (Rep-Mich.), who was strongly against impeachment before the weekend and who played a key role in scuttling a Housing Banking Committee's Watergate investigation last year, said yesterday he now is undecided about impeachment.

Liberal Democrats in Congress seemed agreed that the first priority, ahead of considering impeaching of the President, was to pass legislation creating an independent special prosecutor

to continue Cox's work and protect his records. Though such a bill would be subject to presidential veto, some felt the two-thirds vote needed to override a veto could be obtained for the first time this year.

ALBERT

Albert has refused any comment on the weekend events, but Democratic whip John McFall (Dem-Calif.) said after the meeting of Democratic leaders that he believes Albert "earnestly desires" that action on confirming House minority leader Gerald R. Ford as vice president, to succeed the resigned Spiro T. Agnew, should be disposed of before the House votes on the question of impeaching the President.

There has been speculation that Ford's nomination may be delayed and jeopardized by the possibility of impeachment.

Representative Morris K. Udall (Dem-Ariz.) suggested that Congress speedily confirm Ford as part of an agreement that Mr. Nixon would then resign in Ford's favor. He said this would spare the country the "Agony" of such events as the Democratic Congress holding Ford hostage during court suits and impeachment proceedings, and would show that Democrats are not trying to grab the White House from the Republicans.

Udall said he considered Ford a man of integrity qualified to be President. If Ford is short on innovation and articulateness, said Udall, so have been other presidents who produced stability and trust.

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