

# Impeachment Drive Loses Steam: Laird

By Carroll Kilpatrick

By a Washington Post Staff Writer

White House counselor Melvin R. Laird, who keeps a close ear to the ground on Capitol Hill, said yesterday that he does not now believe there is "a great desire" in the House to impeach President Nixon.

At present, Laird said in answer to questions at a White House meeting with reporters, there would be "a substantial vote" against impeachment.

Laird said he met some 70 or 80 House members the day before and has kept in close touch with sentiment on both sides of the Capitol.

Laird was asked whether he believed Mr. Nixon would serve out his term. He said he took the President at his word that he has no intention of resigning and discounts the possibility of impeachment under the present circumstances.

Rep. John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz), who is due to replace Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford as Republican leader in the House, said in an interview Wednesday that he thought

there would be a vote on an impeachment resolution in the House Judiciary Committee.

Rhodes said it was "quite possible" that a resolution might be reported to the full House, but he added that he did not think that The House would approve such a resolution now.

On the basis of present evidence, Rhodes said, he did not think there were grounds for impeachment.

The disclosure that there is a gap of 18 minutes in a taped conversation between the President and former aide H. R. Haldeman has "hurt" the President's position, Laird said.

"When you have a problem it is better to talk about it," Laird said.

Laird affirmed earlier statements that he intends to leave the White House a short time after Ford is confirmed as Vice President.

Ford can perform the duties Laird is now carrying out as the President's adviser on relations with Congress, the counsellor said.

"As Vice President, he can do this better than I can," he said. "I was for him for Vice President and I think he should be an active Vice President."

Laird resigned in January as Secretary of Defense and was brought back into the administration in June following the shake-up in the White House staff following the Watergate disclosures in April. He said then he did not intend to remain in the Post indefinitely.