

Hill Vote to Impeach Seen Easier Choice

By Susanna McBee
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Former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson said yesterday that a House vote for impeachment of President Nixon is likely to be "easier" than a vote against it.

Richardson said the House would have a "tough call" if all it has is evidence that "the President exhibited an attitude that could be interpreted as encouraging the original Watergate break-in or the cover-up and . . . a willingness to utilize government agencies to find out what people are saying" in the name of national security.

But the former Cabinet official concluded in a breakfast meeting with a group of reporters that "the situation is likely to make a vote for impeachment easier than a vote against."

He explained, "A congressman can say, 'All I did was say there are grounds to justify a charge—that the whole thing should be aired.'"

Richardson said he would "rather not be construed as making a prediction" of how the House will vote, but it is known that he feels the House will probably vote for impeachment and that the Senate will probably not be able to muster a two-thirds vote for conviction.

He has also made clear his feelings that if such a scenario develops, the nation will be severely damaged and deeply divided.

Richardson said Mr. Nixon might restore the confidence he said the public has lost in the administration if the President cooperates with the various Watergate investigative units, candidly acknowledges "personal blame to the extent that this rests not simply on direct acts of omission and commission but a development of attitudes on which other acts were committed," and makes "clear-out recommendations" to prevent future Watergate scandals.

"Simply to allow the proc-



ELLIOT L. RICHARDSON
... sees "tough call"

esses to work their way is not an adequate response," Richardson said, adding that a "deepening of cynicism" on the part of the public "can result in a significant impairment of our self-governing capacity."

Asked if he thinks there is a realistic chance that the President will take the steps the former Attorney General recommended, Richardson said, "I wouldn't rate it very high. If he does not, the impeachment process should go forward in as orderly and responsible way as possible with a minimum intrusion of partisanship."

"It is important that the House, in fact and in appearance, rise to the constitutional responsibilities it faces with dignity and in a manner to contribute confidence that the process is honest and fair."

Richardson said he thinks a President can be impeached for "abuses of presidential power and authority not embraced in the normal definition of a crime," but he said he has no clear answer as to what such abuses would be.

He said if he were a congressman, he "would want to have more information than I have" before voting on impeachment.

He stressed that he does not

feel Mr. Nixon should resign, adding that "the national interest would be better served by a process that brought the facts out in an orderly way and permitted a congressional and public verdict rather than for the President simply to abdicate."

A resignation without the fact-finding process could be a dangerous precedent, he added. "It could have the effect of encouraging pressures on the presidency."

Richardson also said he thinks Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski and John Doar, chief counsel to the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment panel, should make a joint appeal to U.S. District Court Chief Judge John J. Sirica to allow Jaworski to share evidence with the panel.

Richardson disagrees with Vice President Gerald R. Ford's contention last week that "a few extreme partisans . . . (a) relatively small group of activists" are out to impeach the President and are using the Watergate scandal for their own purposes.

Richardson said he thinks it is "a mistake . . . to suppose that the only people who express views are those who have always been opposed" to Mr. Nixon. Richardson said that a lot of Mr. Nixon's opponents are urging impeachment, but he insisted that "the problem is broader and larger than that. It requires a response to those who have supported him and would like to support him again."

Assessing the underlying cause of the Watergate scandals, Richardson said, "It comes down really to a set of attitudes toward the conduct of the presidency and the political process — attitudes that this is an adversarial process. The more you look at it in these terms, the more you find it permissible to use tactics that would be used against an enemy. I think this has been a limitation of the Nixon presidency . . . the tragic flaw of his presidency."

Of his own political future, Richardson said he finds "no

necessity to take myself out of the picture" of a presidential candidacy.

He said he was approached about running as a third-party candidate. "I have thought about it, but the idea does not appeal to me. I've been active in the Republican Party a long time, and I believe that the principle of a two-party system is good."

He said his current activities of writing, lecturing at universities and making political speeches give him the "opportunity to gauge the situation." Richardson said he has "all but excluded" the idea of running for governor of Massachusetts this year.

Asked to compare his presidential quest with that of Sens. Charles H. Percy (R-ILL.) and Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.), he said, "Theirs is a more formal effort than anything I will be doing."