

IMPEACHMENT

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Our job is to educate - 'Impeach - it'll teach'

The next few months will be crucial to the history and future of this country. The machinery of impeachment is beginning to roll and in the next few weeks, evidence, testimony, reports and results will begin flowing into the House Judiciary Committee. The Congress that must face the issue of impeachment has returned to Washington to wait for the day on which it must decide to impeach or not to impeach Richard Nixon.

Our task in the coming months will not be easy. Now that the Judiciary Committee has begun the investigative procedure, the importance of letter writing has diminished somewhat. That does not mean our efforts in this area should stop but only that we have reached a point where other projects should be getting priority.

The results of the Roper Poll verify our initial strategy, to wit: the one element vital to bringing about the impeachment of Richard Nixon is full public understanding of exactly what impeachment means. We must repeatedly stress that the House impeaches and the Senate tries; the House accuses, the Senate decides.

The Poll clearly indicates that the majority of people are still reluctant to call for impeachment. This reluctance, however, is based on a lack of knowledge rather than a belief in Nixon's innocence. Seventy-nine percent of the people polled believed that he was guilty of at least one of the crimes set forth in the Bill of Particulars, but

only 44 percent feel he should be impeached. Of those same people, 37 percent thought that impeachment means that he is automatically thrown out of office. Only 52 percent knew that it meant "indictment" while another 11 percent didn't know which it meant.

The high level of misinformation on the subject of impeachment led Roper to conclude that of the 52 percent who answered the question correctly, a large number were probably guessing. Therefore, the Roper analysts believe that probably less than 50 percent of the people actually know the correct meaning of the word "impeachment."

Our immediate task then is to better educate the public on the procedure. Once given the correct definition of impeachment, the poll results were evenly divided. A majority of those who are against impeachment said it was because it would be too destructive to the country. Only 11 percent are against impeachment because they think the charges are not true and 6 percent because they think the charges are not serious enough.

One year ago today the first Watergate trial was under way. Today, at least four grand juries are investigating Watergate and related matters; criminal trials are pending in New York, Washington and Los Angeles; further indictments are expected within the month; the Senate Watergate Committee and the House Judiciary

Committee are proceeding; and, disclosures continue through the media. Thus, impeachment and trial by the Senate seem the only way to effect full disclosures and to "get Watergate behind us."

Once he was impeached, President Andrew Johnson's trial lasted *less than two months*. Impeachment and trial seem the least destructive alternatives and may be not merely our easy way out but our only way out.

Thus, the job of those seeking impeachment is clear. Because many people, in effect, favor impeachment without knowing it, our job is to *educate*. The basic point to be brought home again and again is that impeachment is not conviction, but rather, it is the finding that sufficient evidence of wrongdoing exists to bring a public official to trial.

We must spend as much time and utilize whatever "human resources" we have in the area of public education. Our speakers bureau becomes one of the main tools we have at our disposal. A concerted effort should be made in each community to seek out whatever platforms are available and get our people out speaking. The distribution of literature is also vitally important.

Whether it's public meetings or neighborhood coffees, our chief goal must be public education so that we might have a well-informed public when the impeachment debate begins in the House of Representatives.