

# St. Clair Set to Meet With House Committee

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President Nixon has instructed his chief Watergate lawyer to offer to meet with the leaders of the House Judiciary Committee on its inquiry into possible grounds for impeachment.

Rep. Peter Rodino (D-N.J.), chairman of the committee, announced that presidential special counsel James St. Clair had written him Tuesday stating that the President had directed him "to make myself available to consult with you or your special counsel, Mr. John M. Doar, and members of his staff, with reference to the current investigation . . ."

Rodino announced that Doar and the minority counsel, Albert Jenner, will arrange to meet "promptly" with St. Clair for "preliminary" discussions.

The committee has been uncertain whether Mr. Nixon would cooperate with its inquiry and honor its requests and subpoenas or resist them.

This was the first contact between the committee and the White House since the Judiciary Committee set the impeachment inquiry in motion last October, Rodino said.

Asked if he considered St. Clair's letter a hopeful sign for cooperation, Rodino said, "It speaks for itself."

The senior Republican on the committee, Rep. Edward Hutchinson, (R-Mich.), said he was "very pleased" by the White House initiative and was "confident that real cooperation will be forthcoming."

House Republicans yesterday took the unusual action of drafting a 15-year House veteran, Rep. Delbert Latta (R-Ohio), to fill a vacancy on the Judiciary Committee rather than give it to junior Republicans who had applied. Latta, who will continue to serve on

the House Rules Committee, said he expects to get off Judiciary as soon as the impeachment inquiry is completed.

House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes of Arizona said Latta had been selected because leaders felt they should pick the member with the "most ability and experience" available during the impeachment inquiry.

Republicans on the Judiciary Committee say they do not consider to be sitting as legal defense for the President. But Republicans evidently feel that they should at least fill the vacancy with a member favorably disposed toward the President and one who can hold his own in committee infighting.

Latta—conservative and an aggressive, tough questioner—said yesterday that he believes that the President should not be impeached for anything less than a showing of criminal activity. "I consider him innocent until proven guilty," said Latta. "I will demand facts, not gossip or hearsay."

In terms of the documents or testimony the committee needs to help make a judgment on impeachment, first talks with St. Clair seek some specific understanding as to what kind of information the resident would voluntarily submit.

In his State of the Union message, Mr. Nixon promised to cooperate to the extent "consistent with my responsibility" to the office of the Presidency. Republican leaders have taken this to mean that he would comply with requests for "relevant" information, but not a "fishing expedition." But Republican leaders say the President has not told them exactly what his statement meant.