

House, Nixon Lawyers Meet on Data

By Richard L. Lyons

Washington Post Staff Writer

Lawyers for the House Judiciary Committee and President Nixon have held what was called a friendly but inconclusive first meeting on procedures for obtaining White House information the committee needs for its presidential impeachment inquiry.

John Doar, the committee's special counsel, said neither he nor James D. St. Clair, head of the President's legal team, had authority to make any specific commitments at their Monday meeting in Doar's office at the Capitol.

Doar said the meeting "went very well," but added that "the one thing Mr. St. Clair made clear was that he wanted to know what procedures the committee would have" for preserving the confidentiality of information that the White House might turn over to the committee.

Doar and Albert Jenner, counsel for committee Republicans, briefed the committee in closed session on their meeting with St. Clair and then discussed it with newsmen.

Doar said St. Clair was concerned about publicity that might prejudice fair trials in upcoming Watergate cases,

and disclosure of national security information.

Whether this was laying the base for White House refusal to turn over voluntarily much information the committee feels it needs was not clear. Most committee members felt this first exchange was more positive than negative.

Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) said "there was an offer to cooperate" on St. Clair's part. In any case, the House has armed the committee with broad power to obtain any information it feels necessary by subpoena if it is not turned over voluntarily.

Jenner called the meeting "exploratory" with "some sparring, but pleasant" and "no element of noncooperation." He spoke of the "pervasive and overriding consideration of confidentiality" on St. Clair's part and the "pervasive and overriding responsibility of the committee to investigate."

Rodino said the committee will attempt by the end of next week to adopt rules for examining White House documents. "We are not going to present our rules to Mr. St. Clair for approval," Rodino said. "We will say we have

done this and are ready to move forward."

One procedure mentioned was that first access to White House documents be limited to Doar, Jenner, Rodino and Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.), senior Republican on the committee. They could screen out what was considered not necessary to the inquiry and make the rest available to the full committee and ultimately to the public if the committee recommends impeachment.

Information which the four felt should not be made public might be made available to committee members, as has been done in the past, by permitting them to examine it alone in a secure room without making copies or taking notes.

The issue of confidentiality could cause problems with junior committee members who may demand first-hand access to all information that bears on the question of whether the President should be impeached for Watergate or other actions.

Rodino stated emphatically that the committee will not keep secret any information that is a factor in making

their decision on impeachment.

"The public will know on what the judgment was based," he said.

Doar said he told St. Clair generally what sort of information—"documents, logs and tapes"—the committee will need, but made no specific request for them.