

PRESIDENT'S VIEW ON IMPEACHMENT DISPUTED IN HOUSE

Members of Judiciary Panel Would Not Limit Action to a Criminal Offense

By **JAMES M. NAUGHTON**

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 26—Republicans and Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee challenged today President Nixon's assertion that he could not be impeached except on the basis of evidence that he had violated criminal law.

But several members of the committee conducting an impeachment inquiry said that, as a practical matter, the outcome of the investigation would probably turn on Mr. Nixon's involvement, if any, in criminal aspects of the Watergate scandal.

And the members and staff of the Judiciary Committee appeared more concerned, for the moment, with determining the extent of White House cooperation with the panel's request for documents, tape recordings and other evidence.

Request Sent to White House

Officials of the committee confirmed that a request for some 700 pages of documents and 17 tape recordings was sent to the White House last night. John M. Doar, the panel's special counsel, said last week that it should take the President's lawyers no more than "just a day or two" to comply voluntarily with the request.

Investigative sources also disclosed that Mr. Doar met today with the Watergate special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, as part of a continuing effort to gain access to evidence gathered for three Watergate grand juries and to determine what specific evidence Mr. Nixon refused to supply to Mr. Jaworski earlier this month.

The Senate Republican leader, Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, pressed Mr. Nixon today to make a full disclosure of all

Continued on Page 19, Column 4

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Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

relevant evidence to both the committee and the special prosecutor.

"If it were up to me," Mr. Scott said, "I would have pulled a truck up at the gates of the White House a long time ago and given them every damn memo they wanted, the whole works."

Mr. Nixon asserted at a White House news conference last night that his Watergate lawyers had advised him "that a criminal offense on the part of the President is the requirement for impeachment." He

said that the Constitution was "very precise" in setting that standard.

The statement was in direct conflict with the conclusion of the bipartisan staff of lawyers for the committee, who said in a 49-page memorandum last week that a President could be impeached on such noncriminal grounds as dereliction of duty or failure to comply with the Constitution's mandate to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

Senior Republicans on the committee — including Representatives Robert McClory of Illinois, Charles E. Wiggins of California, Charles W. Sandman Jr. of New Jersey and Tom Railsback of Illinois—said today that they agreed for the most part with the committee staff's judgment.

The staff analysis was "very

accurate academically and historically," Mr. McClory said. But he added that he would "question whether it would have any applicability to the President at this time."

Mr. Wiggins also said that the House had the power to impeach officials for a variety of serious, but not necessarily criminal, offenses, but that "we should exercise our power narrowly" when dealing with a President who was elected to a fixed term.

A similar view was expressed by Representative Edward Mezvinsky, Democrat of Iowa.

Other Democrats were more blunt in attacking the President's position. Representative Jerome R. Waldie of California, the principal sponsor of one of more than a dozen impeachment resolutions, said that

"most people who have read the Constitution" would disagree with Mr. Nixon's interpretation.

Representative Robert W. Kastenmeier, Democrat of Wisconsin, said: "The President, of course, is personally involved in this and his views have to be biased in the extreme. It seems pretty self-serving to suggest so narrow an interpretation."

Mr. Railsback, who said that it was "incumbent on us to find evidence of a very serious offense, but not necessarily a crime," told newsmen that Mr. Nixon was only adopting the same position that objects of impeachment inquiries have expressed throughout the history of the United States.

Mr. Sandman said that his own standard for judging Mr.

Nixon's conduct would be that the President could be impeached for an offense "of a highly serious nature affecting the conduct of the nation's business."

Richardson Also Disagrees

DALLAS, Feb. 26 (UPI) —

The former Attorney General, Elliot L. Richardson, disagreed today with President Nixon on the grounds for Presidential impeachment but predicted that Mr. Nixon would escape impeachment.

"I think the odds favor his conclusion that he won't be impeached," Mr. Richardson said at a news conference. "The evidence won't show direct criminal involvement in a criminal act, that he knew in advance of the Watergate break-in or participated in the cover-up."

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