

House Republicans Call Conspiracy Impeachable

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WASHINGTON, March 4 — Several senior Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee, who have taken the position that a President may be impeached only for serious violations of criminal laws, said today that they would regard conspiring to obstruct justice as such a serious violation.

The Republicans noted that they were speaking in the abstract—with no knowledge of the substance of the sealed report—and one of them qualified his position. Nonetheless, their comments, as committee members believed to hold the most severely restricted views of the scope of the impeachment inquiry, were regarded as significant.

The Republicans' position underscored the potential importance of the sealed report, which the grand jurors gave last Friday to Chief Judge John J. Sirica of the United States District Court here.

Possible Involvement

Well-placed sources said over the weekend that the sealed document contained the grand jurors' conclusions about Mr. Nixon's possible involvement in a conspiracy to obstruct the Watergate investigation. McClary of Illinois, the second-ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, said in an interview today that he did not know the contents of the sealed report. But he added, in response to a question, that conspiring to obstruct justice "would be in the category of serious offenses" for which, in his view, a President could be impeached.

The same basic position was stated in interviews by three other Republican Representatives, Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, Charles E. Wiggins of California and Lawrence J. Hogan of Maryland.

Judge Sirica set a hearing for Wednesday to determine what he should do with the report and accompanying evidence. The grand jurors reportedly urged him to turn the report and evidence over to the House impeachment inquiry.

The court proceedings overshadowed for the moment the apparent failure of the White House to respond to the committee's request on Feb. 25 for Watergate tape recordings, documents and other evidence.

The committee's chairman,

Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, warned tonight that the White House had been given "a reasonable time" to volunteer the evidence. The committee could decide, at a meeting tomorrow, to issue a subpoena for the material if the committee still had not heard from Mr. Nixon's lawyers.

Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois, chairman of the House Republican Conference, said that the sealed grand jury report appeared to be "fraught with enormous consequence."

His statement was borne out by the response of key Republicans on the issue of the grounds for impeachment.

Democrats on the committee have generally taken a broad view that the President could be impeached for any of a variety of offenses—such as failure to carry out constitutional duties—that were not contrary to criminal law.

But some Republicans, including Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Wiggins, have tried to persuade their colleagues that the scope of impeachment of a president is narrow and limited to serious criminal misconduct.