



Impeachment May Be Getting Closer

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IMPEACHMENT of the President, once an almost forbidden subject, has suddenly emerged as the dominant political issue in Washington.

Two Democrats — chairman Robert Strauss of the national committee and chairman Wilbur Mills of the House Ways and Means Committee — provide the best sign of the times.

Strauss until recently has been actively discouraging talk of impeachment on the theory it would help the Democrats to have Mr. Nixon to kick around for the next three years. But last week he told a press briefing that Democrats should "run on the issues, and the issue is very clear — the Nixon leadership."

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AT THE same time, Strauss released results of a poll of the voters who, in the special election of March 5, sent a Democrat to the House to represent the overwhelmingly Republican First District of Ohio. The poll showed that with independents, Watergate was as big an issue as inflation or energy.

It further showed that when the word impeachment was avoided, the majority of voters favored action against the President. Thus, 58 per cent said they would want their Representative to vote to have the Senate "hold a trial to determine President Nixon's innocence or guilt on the charges related to Watergate."

As to Mills, he has risen in the House thanks to an uncanny knack for positioning himself where the majority is going to end up. "Never, never get in front of your troops," he once said in a word of advice

to a younger House member "until you're sure the battle is won."

Last week Mills moved way out in front. He declared that something would be happening "in 30 or 40 days" which would cause the President to resign. The something is the report on Mr. Nixon's tax problems by a congressional committee on which Mills serves.

That Mills would thus prejudice the committee report suggests that he believes the House is going to want Mr. Nixon out. Apparently his judgment is that the House will go for impeachment.

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ON THE Republican side, there is an equal perception that the issue now is impeachment. "The whole focus," the President's Watergate counsel James St. Clair said the other day, "has changed from a secret investigation by the grand jury to impeachment proceedings conducted by the House."

That the House prospect is unfavorable is equally affirmed by White House actions. Mr. Nixon is more and more allying himself with the small bunch of Senate conservatives who would constitute the nucleus of the 34 votes necessary to beat back the two-thirds majority necessary for sustaining an impeachment.

What all this means is that the impeachment dynamic has already been set in motion. While the outcome remains unclear, the indications are that the House will vote articles of impeachment, and that the true crunch will come — if Mr. Nixon remains resolute in his refusal to step down — in the Senate.