

House Probers Are Firm on Demands

Washington

The House Judiciary Committee moved yesterday to avoid an early showdown with the White House over evidence requested for the committee's impeachment inquiry. At the same time, the committee insisted that the President must comply with its requests.

At a news conference called by committee chairman Peter W. Rodino (Dem-N.J.) to respond to a flurry of slighting remarks about the inquiry, Rodino said pointedly:

"We expect and will continue to expect full cooperation from all persons."

The news conference was held after a private caucus by the committee's angry Democrats.

The caucus and news conference were called after two days of White House-generated news stories that implied the President would furnish no more evidence to the inquiry, accused the committee of a "fishing expedition" and compared committee members to "a lot of children" who want second helpings at meal time before they have cleaned their plates.

Central to the dispute is a committee request for tapes of 42 presidential conversations covering a period of days before and after the March 21 conversation during which President Nixon insists he first learned of the Watergate coverup. The White House has refused to respond to the request since February 25.

Although members of both parties agreed that it would be wise to avoid a showdown, they said near-unanimous support exists in the committee for issuing a subpoena to force the President to comply if the evidence is refused.

Representative Robert F. Drinan of Massachusetts told newsmen, "There is an overwhelming consensus that we'll have to subpoena the material at some time — it's just a matter of time."

However, he added, the Democratic caucus had been persuaded by the senior counsel to the inquiry, John M. Doar, that it would be wiser to "build our case carefully — get all our ducks in a row — before moving further and avoid forcing a showdown on the wrong issue at the wrong time."

Representative Jerome R. Waldie (Dem-Calif.) agreed and added: "We are not drawing back from confrontation. We are moving strongly and firmly ahead — we're just not rushing in."

Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, the committee's ranking Republican member, reinforced the Democrats' determination to receive the evidence.

"What we have asked for is very reasonable and very relevant," Hutchinson said. "It is necessary to the inquiry. There would be no inquiry if there were no suspicion about the President's actions in connection with the so-called Watergate coverup."

New York Times