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Nixon Probe
Stymied by
40 Words

By Howard Fields
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President Nixon and the House Judiciary Committee have reached an impasse over 40 words in a 1,000-word letter asking the White House for additional information for the committee's impeachment inquiry.

The letter, written Feb. 25 by John M. Doar, the committee's chief impeachment counsel, contains these 40 words:

"If we could work out a way whereby members of the inquiry staff may examine these files for the purpose of selecting materials which, in our opinion, are necessary for the investigation, I believe that the inquiry could be expedited."

Max Friedersdorf, chief of White House liaison with the House, told Republican members of the committee last week that those words, and not the 42 additional tapes the committee has requested, represent the greatest concern to the President and his defense attorney, James D. St. Clair.

Mr. Nixon mentioned the request for tapes and files at his news conference with businessmen in Chicago Friday, but centered his fire on what he termed a demand for "an index of every document in the White House over the past five years."

This, he said, would be "a fishing license or a complete right to come in and go through all the presidential files ... we cannot go that far."

The week-long drumfire of White House criticism continued yesterday when Ken W. Clawson, administration director of communications, accused the committee of trying to embark on a "general fishing expedition" without first defining an impeachable offense or informing the president of the allegations against him.

Clawson said the committee "hasn't read a single paper" among the 700 White House documents and 19 tapes already turned over, which he said was "more than enough to satisfy their requirements."

Rep. Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.), the committee chairman, said after Mr. Nixon spoke in Chicago that he might call an open meeting this week to discuss what to do next.

Rodino said the 40 words should not be read alone but in context. Doar's letter to St. Clair went on:

"Furthermore, we believe the next logical step is to have you outline for us how the White House files are indexed, how presidential papers are indexed, and how presidential papers are indexed, and how presidential conversations and memoranda are indexed.

"We are particularly interested in knowing how the files of Mr. (H.R.) Haldeman, Mr. (John D.) Ehrlichman, Mr. (Charles W.) Colson and Mr. (John W.) Dean are indexed,"

no continuation.