

Judiciary Panel Keeps Focus on Obtaining Tapes

By Richard L. Lyons

Washington Post Staff Writer

House Judiciary Committee members were pleased by the court decision that they are entitled to the Watergate grand jury's sealed materials. But their focus is still on obtaining 42 tapes that the White House is withholding from their impeachment inquiry.

The committee's special counsel, John Doar, met again yesterday with James D. St. Clair, President Nixon's chief defense counsel, to try to "negotiate" release of the tapes of Mr. Nixon's conversations.

Doar said that in his talks with St. Clair he is trying to "be as specific as we can as to the reasons we want this material and to explain as thoroughly as we can what we expect to do with it."

Regarding the grand jury material, the Judiciary Committee has insisted from the start that it is entitled to it because of the House's sole constitutional jurisdiction over impeachment. The committee has refused to be a litigant in the case because it felt it should not submit itself to the jurisdiction of any court. Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) indicated the committee would continue this stance during appeals.

Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.), the committee's senior Republican, said he expected an appeal from Sirica's decision would be decided quickly.

Rodino said any delay—the request for the 42 White House tapes was submitted three weeks ago yesterday—makes it more difficult to meet his target date of making a final report to the House by April 30. But Rodino appeared not yet ready to bring the issue to a head by issuing a subpoena for the tapes, because White House defiance could then produce a confrontation over this narrow issue.

The committee has now received and its staff is studying virtually all of the 700 documents and 19 tapes which the White House offered it, Rodino said.

Rodino said his personal

view would be to turn down St. Clair's request that he be permitted to examine the sealed grand jury materials. Rodino said the inquiry was not an adversary proceeding, in which lawyers of opposing sides are entitled to see documents.