

New White House Idea On the Tapes Dispute

Washington

The White House, searching for a way to halt the gathering momentum of impeachment, suggested yesterday that the president would be willing to turn over transcripts of disputed tapes to the house judiciary committee if they are first monitored by chief Watergate counsel James St. Clair.

White House Counsellor Bryce Harlow said that St. Clair would have a professional obligation as a lawyer to accurately transcribe the content of tapes requested by committee counsel John Doar and Albert Jenner.

Harlow stressed that the evidence should not be yielded at all until the committee defines the grounds of impeachment.

"I can see the possibility . . . that Doar and Jenner might say to St. Clair we want anything on that tape that refers to clemency or hush money,

and then trust the opposing attorney to furnish it — because his whole professional reputation is at stake," Harlow said.

Despite this latest suggestion, there was a growing feeling in the White House and on Capitol Hill that Mr. Nixon can not now head off the impeachment process in the house.

Minority leader John Rhodes of Arizona, asked at a closed-door Wednesday night meeting of Republican press secretaries whether the president could "pull a rabbit out of the hat" and avoid impeachment, replied: "Don't bet on it."

A highly placed White House source said he was not optimistic that a confrontation could be avoided and added that if an agreement isn't reached "I could see a subpoena next week."

The judiciary committee is seeking the tapes of 42

conversations. St. Clair has declined to hand them over.

Harlow said yesterday at a breakfast meeting of reporters that it would be improper of committee counsel Doar to listen to a conversation that the president had with former chief of staff H.R. Haldeman about Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. He said that St. Clair would be the logical person to screen out those portions of the conversations not relevant to the judiciary committee inquiry.

If the committee once defines an impeachable offense and draws a "bill of particulars," said Harlow, there might be cooperation.

"If they said we want anything on the tape of such and such a date related to the Watergate break - in or burglary . . . they'd have a very solid case that would be very hard to resist," Harlow said. "As it stands, the committee wants to come



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JAMES D. ST. CLAIR
A new role proposed

into the White House files and look around for some kind of charge to use against the president. That is an outrageous procedure."

Harlow, while predicting that there are still insufficient votes in the House to impeach the president, said the situation was "least favorable" in the judiciary committee and "most favorable" in the Senate.

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