

HOUSE UNIT PLANS HEARINGS BY MAY 1

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6 Weeks for Impeachment
Inquiry Studied—Public
May See Portions

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WASHINGTON, April 1—

Members of the House Judiciary Committee are considering a timetable that envisions beginning hearings on impeachment evidence by May 1 and completing committee action by mid-June.

Some of the hearings are expected to be open to the public, and the possibility of allowing television coverage is being discussed.

Although the dates are still tentative, sources familiar with the developing plans report general support for beginning full committee hearings of the evidence on President Nixon's conduct in office after the House returns from the Easter recess on April 22.

'Expediently'

Members of the impeachment inquiry staff have estimated that it will require six weeks for the committee to hear and digest the material and, barring unforeseen difficulties, allow final action by about June 15.

Word of the planning came as Representative Wilbur D. Mills, Arkansas Democrat, reported his belief that a majority of the House was prepared to support impeachment.

Representative Mills, who is chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and a member of the committee investigating the President's taxes, made the statement in an interview taped for broadcast tonight by the Public Broadcasting Service.

"There's no doubt in my mind," he said, "that there are enough votes really — and I can't prove it — for the articles of impeachment in the House."

He added, however, that he still believed that sentiment in

Continued on Page 33, Column 6

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

the Senate was still less than the two-thirds majority that would be necessary to convict an impeached President.

The Judiciary Committee chairman, Peter W. Rodino, New Jersey Democrat, declined to discuss a timetable today except to say that the committee and staff needed to move "carefully and expeditiously."

However, sources familiar with the developing schedule reported that Mr. Rodino was leaning toward a May 1 date to allow the impeachment staff adequate time to prepare for public display of the evidence.

Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, the committee's ranking Republican, said today that members of his party on the committee had voiced "strong sentiment for beginning hearings on April 23.

"I assume a realistic target date would be to finish by the end of May," Mr. Hutchinson said, but he called that date only "a ballpark figure."

Role for St. Clair

Details on procedures for the hearings have yet to be worked out, according to those familiar with the plans. Among the major hurdles involved are how to prepare committee members adequately for public hearings without running the risk that premature leaks of evidence and information could open to question the objectivity of the proceedings.

Another possible impediment may soon be removed. Representative Rodino indicated today that he was disposed to agree with other committee

members who argue for providing some role in the hearings to the President's lawyer. James D. St. Clair, counsel to the President, has argued for the right to be present and to cross-examine witnesses.

Mr. Rodino does not appear to be ready to support such a proposal but said today he was not "inflexible" on the question and expressed his concern that the proceeding not only be, but appear to be, "fair."

One suggestion being considered by Mr. Rodino would allow Mr. St. Clair a limited role in the hearings upon specific request but exclude the right to cross-examine witnesses.

Dean Reported on Tapes

The chairman has repeatedly announced his intention not to turn the hearings "into adversary proceedings" but to keep them in the nature of an investigation.

Discussion of a timetable—which indicates the staff has begun to see the shape of the evidence it must present to the committee members—began within days of the receipt of the Federal grand jury's report dealing with Mr. Nixon's conduct during the period of the Watergate scandal.

That report, which is still secret, reportedly contains tapes of key conversations by Mr. Nixon with his former counsel, John W. Dean 3d, who maintains he tried to warn the President of White House involvement in the original burglary and cover-up.

That report was received by the committee staff on March 27, and Mr. Rodino and Mr.

Hutchinson have been examining evidence in it since Thursday.

On Friday, Republican members of the committee were briefed by Albert E. Jenner Jr., the minority counsel on the inquiry staff. Republicans began to press then for details on a possible timetable for hearings.

Until receipt of the grand jury report, the committee leaders refused to discuss, even privately with the members, a possible schedule because of resistance from the White House toward furnishing further material. A request of Feb. 25 is still pending that the White House furnish material dealing with Presidential conversations before and after March 21, 1973, when Mr. Nixon says he first learned of White House involvement in the scandal.

Committee members have reported no progress in negotiations between Mr. St. Clair and counsel for the inquiry staff in an effort to gain compliance with their request without resort to a subpoena. However, the committee leadership is still privately expressing confidence the matter can be settled without a confrontation.