

WXPost

Rodino Sees Private Sessions

APR 19 1974

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Los Angeles Times

There is "every likelihood" the House Judiciary Committee will meet privately when it begins hearing evidence against President Nixon in its impeachment inquiry, chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) said yesterday.

Rodino said in an interview he believes a majority of the 33-member committee wants to hear the staff's summary of the case behind closed doors. This is expected to take a week, beginning May 7. A Rodino aide said later the chairman feels the committee should continue to meet in private as it mulls evidence in detail during the ensuing three to four weeks.

Rodino said that members of the committee are concerned that evidence presented publicly could prejudice the rights of individuals scheduled to be tried in the Watergate case and that unsubstantiated evidence could defame the President and prejudice any resulting impeachment case against him.

On the other hand, Rodino said, two factors might persuade the committee to hear evidence in open session:

- An "overriding importance" of keeping the public informed and of assuring the public that the committee is conducting a fair and impartial inquiry.

- A problem of leaks of information from closed sessions that could cause the public to get a distorted view of the proceedings.

Many observers believe leaks will be inevitable, but Rodino said the committee proved it could keep secrets when it had access to confidential FBI reports during confirmation hearings for Vice President Ford.

In the event all or most of the proceedings are behind closed doors, Rodino said, the news media probably will be supplied with daily summaries of information the staff presents to the committee.

An aide to Rodino later said that any committee debate following its evaluation of the evidence will be held in open session. A vote on impeach-

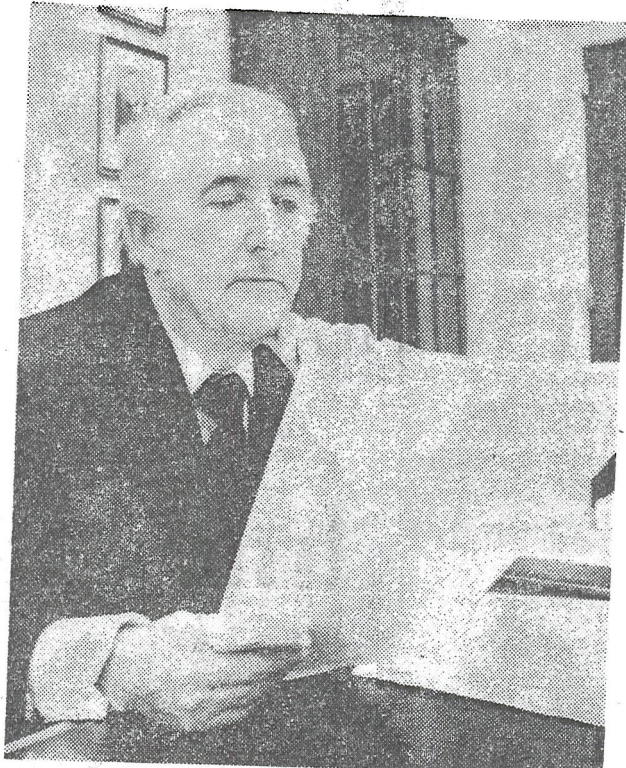
ment also would be public, he said.

If most of the proceedings are closed, the public may not get its first look at the full body of evidence until after the committee votes on a bill of impeachment, probably in late June.

(In other ramifications of the Watergate case yesterday, the New York City Bar Association announced an investigation that might possibly lead to the disbarment of President Nixon, former Attorney General John Mitchell and others involved in the case.)

(At the same time it was learned that the Watergate special prosecutor's office has taken over an investigation of President Nixon's controversial gift of pre-presidential papers.)

Meeting for the first time after the Easter recess, the committee Thursday will consider staff recommendations to narrow the focus of its inquiry and will discuss the President's response to a committee subpoena ordering him to produce tapes and other records of 42 presidential conversations. The



Associated Press

Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter Rodino in his office.

tivities conducted by or at the direction of the White House.

- Intelligence activities conducted by or at the direction of the White House as part of the campaign to re-elect Mr. Nixon in 1972.

- White House efforts to use agencies of the executive branch for political purposes, and White House involvement with election campaign contributions.

- Allegations concerning improprieties in connection with the income taxes and personal finances of the President.

Failure by Mr. Nixon to fully comply with a committee subpoena for evidence also could constitute grounds for impeachment, Rodino and several other committee members have said.

The White House has indicated that Mr. Nixon will relinquish some, but not all, of the materials now under subpoena before the Thursday deadline.

So far only Rodino, Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.), the ranking minority member, and senior members of the staff have had access to the most sensitive evidence collected in the impeachment inquiry. It includes tapes and other records of presidential conversations turned over by the White House, as well as evidence and a sealed report from a federal grand jury that investigated the Watergate cover-up.

The other 20 Democrats and 16 Republicans on the committee will get their first look at the evidence after the staff begins its presentation of a "statement of facts."

John M. Doar, special counsel to the committee, said the statement will be in paragraph form and will include "the relevant facts the staff believes to be established by the evidence."

Each paragraph, he said, will have footnoted references to evidentiary material, such as affidavits and other documents, tapes, tape transcripts and transcripts of sworn grand jury or congressional testimony.

Upon completion of this presentation, the committee members, either individually or collectively, will listen to tapes and review other evidence.

committee contends the materials are relevant to the Watergate cover-up phase of its inquiry.

The staff is prepared to recommend the dropping of several subjects of the inquiry. Rodino has said that the committee probably will drop from its investigation allegations concerning presidential impoundment of funds voted by Congress and irregularities in the administration of several federal agencies.

The Los Angeles Times has learned that there also is heavy sentiment on the committee for dropping two other subjects—the secret bombing of Cambodia and the dismantling of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Both subjects are considered to be in the area of "political judgment," rather than a serious abuse of power.

The major areas of inquiry being pursued by the committee's 101-member staff, which includes 43 attorneys, are:

- The Watergate break-in and related activities, including alleged cover-up efforts by persons in the White House and others.

- Domestic surveillance ac-