

'Down to the Nitty Gritty'

Impeachment Probe May Narrow

Washington

Lawyers for the House Judiciary Committee will propose today that the scope of the impeachment inquiry be narrowed sharply to include only the most serious potential charges of wrongdoing by President Nixon.

If adopted by the committee, the plan would focus the President's role in the Watergate coverup attempt, the preparation of Mr. Nixon's income tax returns and the clandestine activities of the secret White House intelligence unit known as the "Plumbers."

"We're really getting down to the nitty-gritty now," said Representative Tom Railsback of Illinois after he and the other Republicans on the committee were briefed privately on the recommendation by Albert E. Jenner Jr., the chief minority counsel.

Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, the senior Republican on the panel, said that the plan would mean eliminating from further consideration "most of the 56 allegations contained in a March 1 outline of the inquiry staff is investigation."

Participants in the closed, two-hour Republican caucus disclosed that the committee lawyers have agreed to propose dropping some allegations because there was no evidence to implicate the President directly and to suggest eliminating other issues because they are unlikely to be considered impeachable offenses in a vote of the full House of Representatives.

Jenner reportedly read to the Republicans from a draft he prepared with the Senior Democratic appointee on the inquiry staff, John M. Doar, the special counsel. Their bipartisan conclusions

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were considered likely to be approved when the committee's 21 Democrats and 17 Republicans vote on the proposal today.

Members who took part in the briefing said that not all the details of the plan were outlined, but that the lawyers were prepared to recommend abandoning the following matters:

- The President's refusal to spend funds appropriated by Congress would be dropped because, as one Republican member stated it, there was "ample evidence" that Congress had tolerated the practice by Mr. Nixon and his predecessors.

- Charges of illegal corporate and union contributions to the President's 1972 re-election campaign would be abandoned for lack of documentation of any personal involvement by Mr. Nixon.

- Most of the 26 separate allegations of misuse of government agencies to exact political funds from corporations and individuals would be eliminated. Many were said to be too nebulous to trace or too intricate to investigate in a reasonable period of time.

- The committee would drop its investigation of the President's attempt to dismantle the Office of Economic Opportunity, which Republicans on the committee had opposed as a purely political issue and not a matter for impeachment.

Participants in the briefing said the lawyers would pursue, at least for now, charges that Mr. Nixon cited improperly in authorizing the secret bombing of Cambodia.

The committee members said that whether this issue would eventually be part of an impeachment recommendation probably would depend on the contents of a re-

port being prepared on the bombing by Senator Harold E. Hughes (Dem-Iowa).

The Republicans also reported that the staff would continue investigating allegations that the Nixon administration had settled an antitrust action against the International Telephone and Telegraph Co. and had increased federal milk price supports in exchange for 1972 campaign contributions from ITT and the dairy industry.

The committee lawyers asked the White House last week for a number of additional tape recordings and documents dealing with the ITT and milk cases and the Watergate coverup. Jenner was quoted as having said the tapes involved in the latest request totaled 46.1 hours of recorded conversation.

Although several of the Republicans voiced delight at the staff's decision to abandon many of the initial areas of the investigation, they appeared determined to pursue the remaining matters.

The committee's Republicans instructed Jenner to seek a commitment by today from the President's lawyers for some method to permit the panel to verify that relevant evidence is not eliminated from any recordings or transcripts turned over to the committee by the White House.

New York Times