

Latest Nixon Move a Dud**Transcripts' Disclosures of President's Talks Cause A Growing Sense of Horror Among House Members**By JOHN PIERSON and FRED ZIMMERMAN
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WASHINGTON—President Nixon's latest campaign to turn Watergate around appears to be a dud.

Members of the House — who one day must vote on whether to impeach him—continued over the weekend to wade through the 1,300 pages of transcribed Nixon conversations that he has made public in lieu of the tape recordings themselves. While Republicans and some Democrats maintain it is still too early to tell whether the President committed impeachable offenses, there is a growing sense of horror over what even the White House-edited transcripts disclose about Mr. Nixon.

"The tone of it is pretty ghastly," said Rep. Richardson Preyer, a moderate Democrat from North Carolina.

"What's missing from the transcripts is any sense of moral outrage," declared Rep. William Steiger, a middle-of-the road Republican from Wisconsin. "There's no place where the staff or the President clearly said: 'This is morally, legally, ethically, politically or governmentally wrong,'" he added.

Nor does the public — Mr. Nixon's ultimate judge—appear to be any more impressed than Congress with the President's public-relations blitz, which continued over the weekend. According to a Gallup Poll of 694 adults, 42% of the people have a "less favorable" opinion of Mr. Nixon as a result of developments of the past few days, while only 17% have a "more favorable" opinion. (Some 35% have the same opinion while 6% have none.)

Further Delay

Perhaps the most the President can get by dumping so much material on Congress and the public is further delay in the impeachment proceedings. One key House staff man said the House mightn't get to vote on impeachment before September.

And if it gets that late, said Rep. James O'Hara (D., Mich.), the public "may turn in disgust from the whole thing."

The House Judiciary Committee Wednesday or Thursday will begin hearing what its staff has been able to find so far bearing on whether Mr. Nixon should be impeached. But hardly anyone believes the committee will be ready to report to the House by June 30, the date most recently mentioned by Chairman Peter Rodino (D., N.J.).

President Nixon seems aware that the public is becoming increasingly tired of hearing and reading about Watergate. A surefire applause line in the otherwise lackluster speeches he has been making is his declaration that "the time has come to get Watergate behind us and get on with the business of America." He may be counting now on public boredom, as much as anything else, to save him from impeachment.

The public may be bored with Watergate, but Congress appears to be appalled by the President's Watergate transcripts.

"They contain some terribly damaging things," said Rep. John Anderson, a liberal Republican from Illinois, who as chairman of the House Republican Conference is No. 3 in the House GOP leadership. Rep. Anderson cited, in particular, Mr. Nixon's transcribed statements concerning the payment of hush money to at least one of the Watergate defendants.

'My Eyes Are Bleary'

But Rep. Anderson said he will withhold a final judgment on the transcripts until he finishes reading them ("My eyes are bleary") and has had a chance "to reflect." He said that he and his Republican colleagues are "deeply troubled by some of the revelations, but we're holding our powder dry for now."

With Congress and the public "bewildered and benumbed" by the great mass of transcripts, he added, "I don't think the full impact has yet been felt."

Rep. Steiger said that he, too, would have to finish reading the transcripts before he could come to any conclusion about whether they prove that the President committed impeachable offenses. "I mightn't be sure even then," he added. "The tapes don't appear to conclusively show one way or the other."

While Rep. Steiger said his initial reaction to the transcripts was disappointment, "one could make a fairly good case that spreading all of this out—all the blemishes and warts—could be a plus for the President, despite all the negatives involved. This is the most naked President we've had. What would Lyndon Johnson have looked like and smelled like?"

And in Rochester, N.Y., House Republican Leader John Rhodes said he couldn't find evidence in the transcripts of "a high crime or misdemeanor"—two possible grounds for impeachment. But, Rep. Rhodes added, according to the Associated Press, "There's plenty of evidence of discussion of ideas which I find somewhat abhorrent."

The folks in Rep. Preyer's North Carolina district also seem to abhor what they find in the transcripts. "This is Nixon country, and now the people are undergoing a sort of agonizing reappraisal," Rep. Preyer said. The Democratic Congressman said he was sitting next to a man yesterday in Sunday School who told him: "I've always been with him (Mr. Nixon), but these transcripts prove that he's the biggest crook of them all."

Democrats: More Outspoken

As might be expected, many Democrats are even more outspoken than Republicans in their condemnation of the recorded, edited and transcribed Mr. Nixon. "The transcripts show a great and fundamental contempt for the democratic process," declared Rep. Richard Bolling, an influential Democrat from Missouri.

Rep. Bolling said he isn't ready to say for sure whether Mr. Nixon has done anything worthy of impeachment, but he added: "You could impeach a President for just degrading the office."

"Even the expurgated transcripts hurt him more than they help him," said Rep. O'Hara, a liberal. "I don't think it looks very good for him at the moment," he added.

Another Democratic liberal, Rep. Donald Fraser of Minnesota, declared: "It looks as though he participated in a payoff. That's an impeachable offense."

The public response to the President's speech last Monday and his release of the transcripts Tuesday doesn't seem unlike politicians' response. Taken Thursday evening, the Gallup Poll found that 62% of the people believe the Judiciary Committee is right in refusing to accept the transcripts in lieu of the tapes themselves, while 24% said the committee was wrong.

Nixon or Dean?

Some 38% of those polled were more inclined to believe Mr. Nixon's statements about Watergate over the statements of his chief public accuser, John Dean. But 36% were more inclined to believe Dean, even though the former White House counsel has pleaded guilty to conspiracy to obstruct justice.

(Over the weekend, the White House continued its attack on Dean's credibility, issuing a 32-page comparison of his testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee with what he says in the tape transcripts.)

Gallup pollsters found that 44% of the people think there is enough evidence of possible wrongdoing on the part of the President to impeach him in the House and bring him to trial in the Senate, while 41% didn't think there is enough evidence yet. On the other hand, only 38% currently believe Mr. Nixon should be removed from office, while 49% oppose his removal.

Public support for the Judiciary Committee's refusal to accept transcripts instead of tapes is echoed elsewhere in Congress. Sen. Russell Long (D., La.) predicted the White House eventually will have to surrender the tapes, themselves. "They mightn't know it now, but they will," Sen. Long declared.

Sen. Henry Jackson (D., Wash.) said he will insist on hearing the tapes, if there is an impeachment trial in the Senate.

Panel Member Not Satisfied

And a Republican member of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Tom Railsback of Illinois, said he isn't satisfied with Mr. Nixon's apparent unwillingness to let the

committee play the tapes on its own equipment, or to let the tapes be heard by any of the panel's 38 members, besides the chairman and ranking Republican. Nor has the White House made any provision for technical experts to verify that these tapes are the originals and haven't been tampered with.

Over the weekend a court-appointed panel of technical experts turned over to federal Judge John Sirica all the scientific data from its study of an 18-minute gap in a tape subpoenaed last year. The panel's unanimous conclusion, released in January, was that the gap had been caused by at least five separate, manual erasing operations. Judge Sirica didn't make public the back-up data.

Rep. Railsback and a Democratic member of the Judiciary panel, Rep. Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, agreed that the committee also might also have to issue a second subpoena, this one to back up its request for still more tapes relating to the Watergate cover-up, operations of the White House "Plumbers," and allegations that Mr. Nixon sold government favors in return for campaign contributions from dairymen and International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. Interviewed on CBS-TV's "Face the Nation," Rep. Railsback said the committee might have to ask the courts to settle its dispute with Mr. Nixon over the subpoenaed tapes.

Rep. Fraser said the courts should play a full role in impeachment. They shouldn't only settle the subpoena question but also rule on the Senate's verdict, should the Senate convict Mr. Nixon and should the President decide to appeal his conviction, he added. White House aides say Mr. Nixon hasn't any intention of appealing a conviction.

Far Behind Schedule

Bringing the courts into the act would further delay the impeachment process, which already is far behind schedule. Rep. Thomas O'Neill (D., Mass.), the House majority leader, is said to believe the House won't get to vote on impeachment until the last week in July.

And a source close to House Speaker Carl Albert predicted it could be September before the vote comes in the House. If the House waited until September to impeach Mr. Nixon, the source said, it would be "almost impossible" for the Senate to hold a trial and vote before the November elections.

Many Congressmen agree with Rep. Bolling that Mr. Nixon's chief purpose in releasing the 1,300 pages of transcripts is "delay and division." While his move divided the Judiciary Committee along party lines over how to respond, that division seems to be healing.

But delay appears inevitable as the committee plows through the transcripts, negotiates further with the White House over how to verify them, issues another subpoena for other tapes, and possibly appeals the whole thing to the courts.

"The public is going to become very impatient," said Rep. O'Hara. "They're going to blame Congress for dragging things out." To avoid this, he said, "July should be sort of a deadline" for a House vote on impeachment.