

First Phase Of Impeach Probe Ends

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Washington

The House Judiciary Committee completed the first phase of its impeachment inquiry yesterday and chief counsel John Doar said, "I think the matters are of extreme seriousness."

The initial phase, carried on entirely in closed session, dealt with the evidence the committee staff has compiled of President Nixon's role in Watergate.

Albert Jenner, minority counsel for the impeachment inquiry, echoed Doar's words at a post-session briefing when he said, "I think what has been presented to the committee to this moment is of extreme seriousness insofar as the Constitution is concerned."

Both Doar and Jenner cautioned against making any judgments until, in Doar's words "we have considered all the evidence."

The committee members appeared sharply divided on the meaning of the evidence they have heard so far.

Some Democrats are convinced they heard evidence substantiating their belief that Mr. Nixon may be guilty of impeachable offenses, and some Republicans are convinced they heard no such thing.

Subject to expected approval by the members today, the committee plans to begin open hearings next Tuesday and Wednesday, receiving evidence relating to the ITT and milk producers' campaign contributions.

Jenner told reporters the committee then plans to consider the rest of the allegations against Mr. Nixon within the next five weeks, voting by August on articles of impeachment already being drawn up by the staff.

Following the ITT and milk industry sessions, the committee will hear evidence relating to the White House "plumbers" unit, Mr.

Nixon's personal taxes, domestic surveillance, use of government agencies for reprisals or favors, and then the firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox, returning to the Watergate coverup issue and possibly calling witnesses.

Doar brought the panel through the Watergate events up to April 30, 1973, after playing for them two tapes of Mr. Nixon's discussions with John W. Dean III on April 16, 1973, the day before Dean announced he

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would not be a "scapegoat" for the scandal.

Earlier, James D. St. Clair, the President's chief Watergate lawyer, suggested that the committee ought to hear the entire Watergate case before moving on to other areas such as the ITT settlement and political contributions from dairy cooperatives.

But Chairman Peter W. Rodino rejected St. Clair's suggestion, saying, "We are proceeding as we had planned to proceed and as we will continue to proceed."

Doar said that one reason the committee would move on to other areas before returning to the Watergate coverup was that its investigation had reached the time period just prior to the appointment of Archibald Cox as special Watergate prosecutor in May, 1973.

One of the allegations the committee is considering as a possible impeachment offense is the firing of Cox on Oct. 20, 1973.

Doar said that since the special prosecutor was investigating a number of areas other than Watergate

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at the time he was fired it was decided to present evidence in these other areas before taking up the dismissal of Cox.

St. Clair, who has sat in on all the closed sessions, said he did not believe a substantial case had been presented so far.

The initial reaction from

committee members appeared divided along party lines.

Representative Charles Wiggins (Rep-Calif.), a strong defender of the President said, "It most assuredly is not an overwhelming case."

Representative Jerome R. Waldie (Dem-Calif.), a strong supporter of impeachment, said: "I think it is a substantial case. It would be difficult for anyone to conclude the President did not participate in an impeachable offense, obstruction of justice."

Waldie said the strongest evidence he heard was the tape of a conversation on March 21, 1973, during which the President and aides discussed the possibility of paying hush money to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt.

Last week Mr. Nixon rejected a subpoena for 11 Watergate tapes and there appeared to be overwhelming support on the committee for more subpoenas for the rest of the tapes. A vote has been scheduled in an open meeting of the panel today.

The committee also will vote today on whether to send a strong letter to Mr. Nixon which some members have said will warn him that the panel members could draw an "adverse inference" from his refusal to surrender the tapes.

A.P. & U.P.