

RADIO

'Impeachment Watch'--A Blanket Coverage of Hearings

By Bernard Weiner

A LOCAL FM radio station, KPFA in Berkeley, has concocted a full-scale "Impeachment Watch" to provide blanket coverage of impeachment-related events as they break in Washington and here on the West Coast.

While other stations no doubt will carry the live coverage of the House panel's hearings when they are opened to the public, KPFA has decided that such coverage is not enough. So, what it's done is to hire a local Impeachment Watch coordinator (Bill Sokol), hooked into the Pacifica Foundation's beefed-up Washington staff of six, devised a private-line hookup with its three sister stations in Houston, New York, Los Angeles — the result being hours of programming each day devoted solely to the unraveling Watergate impeachment story.

At present, KPFA's Impeachment Watch is from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

Here's how it works. On a day, say, when the House panel is dealing with the dairy fund case — either in camera, or in public hearings — the Impeachment Watch crew might well provide an hour with Ralph Nader detailing his discoveries in the case, along with whatever documented evidence has been assembled by others.

On other issues, there might be commentary from investigative journalist I.F.

Stone in Washington, former Nixon speechwriter Kevin Phillips, or analyst Noam Chomsky.

Or, another example: during the House panel's probe of illegal political surveillance, the Pacifica team will include programs originating from Los Angeles and San Francisco dealing with Ellsberg break-in figures, ex-FBI informers, and the like.

"There's nobody else providing this kind of investigative material on a daily basis," says Impeachment Watch coordinator Sokol, a veteran KPFA newsman. "Other stations may cover the hearings, or use a 30-second clip from a witness, or do a brief interview with people like Nader and Stone and Phillips or whoever — but we're devoting whole hours each day to these topics and these people."

"We feel KPFA has the opportunity here to go deeper and broader into the question of what's really

going on in government," says Sokol.

"In a sense," says KPFA Program Director Craig Pyes, "our listeners are getting more complete impeachment coverage than what's taking place in the House hearing room."

According to Pyes, the expense of presenting this kind of programming is enormous ("but, then, this is the kind of stuff Pacifica should be doing, so we don't mind spending the money").

In July and August, the daily Impeachment Watch will run from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. This will be in addition to any live coverage of the House hearings whenever they go public, which will start at 7 a.m. and run, with breaks, to about 2:30 p.m.

In addition to Sokol, KPFA has also enjoyed the Impeachment Watch services of Carolyn Craven (formerly of KQED-TV's "Newsroom") and a research staff composed of Boalt Hall law students.