

Judiciary Moves to Tax Probe

By Richard L. Lyons
and William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writers

The House Judiciary Committee yesterday completed its examination of staff evidence on the Watergate cover-up and today turns its impeachment inquiry to President Nixon's tax problems.

The staff's chronological presentation of the Watergate story led the committee yesterday through the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox Oct. 20 and a technical discussion of the 18½-minute gap that appears in the tape recording of a presidential conversation of June 20, 1972, three days after the Watergate break-in.

Cox was fired on the President's order because of his insistence in seeking a Supreme Court decision on his authority to demand presidential tapes. That act triggered the impeachment inquiry.

The committee's interest in this episode apparently centers not on the President's authority to fire an employee of the executive branch, but on whether the action was an attempt by Mr. Nixon to continue the Watergate cover-up.

Most observers believe that if the President is impeached the most likely ground would be obstruction of justice for involvement in the cover-up,

starting in March, 1973 when he said he first learned hush money was being paid to Watergate defendants.

Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-Tex.) expressed the view of several Democratic committee members when she said evidence presented yesterday left this matter "open to interpretation. . . I have not resolved it."

The famous 18½-minute gap appears on a tape that Rose Mary Woods, the President's longtime personal secretary, was transcribing. A panel of experts has agreed it required at least five separate manual erasure operations to create the gap, strongly suggesting the gap could not have occurred accidentally while Miss Woods reached over to take a telephone call as she testified.

A recording machine like that from which Miss Woods was transcribing the June 20 conversation was shown the committee yesterday and an expert demonstrated how tapes are transcribed and erased.

"I'm willing to accept the experts' contention that someone had to have erased the tape," said Rep. Lawrence Hogan (R-Md.), "but they didn't tell us who" did it. "I'm not persuaded there is anything significantly new in what I've heard today," he said.

The question before the impeachment inquiry today on the President's finances is whether fraud was committed in his underpayment of \$432,787 in personal income taxes between 1969 and 1972.

Last April 3, the Internal Revenue Service assessed him this amount in taxes due plus interest for non-allowed deductions for donation of his pre-presidential papers and taxes due on real estate transactions. Mr. Nixon agreed to pay. That same day the staff of the congressional Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation concluded the President owed a slightly higher amount. Neither the IRS nor the staff report dealt with the question of whether fraud had been committed.