

Impeachment Unit Limits Witnesses to 5; Democrats Gamble in Push for Quick End

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WASHINGTON — Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee gambled that the American people want a speedy end to the impeachment inquiry more than anything else.

The risk is that people will conclude the Democrats have sacrificed fairness and thoroughness on the altar of speed.

Overriding the request of President Nixon's lawyer and committee Republicans, the Democrats voted to call only five witnesses and to cut off their testimony July 12.

By a 19-to-19 tie vote, the committee defeated a GOP motion to call 10 witnesses, including six requested by the President's lawyer, James St. Clair.

The first witness is due to appear next Tuesday. The committee will decide each day whether to hear the testimony in public or in private.

Republicans protested that the Democrats are trying to ram through an impeachment decision without giving Mr. Nixon his day in court. "They made a real bad mistake," said Rep. Charles Sandman (R., N.J.). "We spent seven months on other forms of evidence and now we're only going to spend seven days with witnesses. It's ridiculous."

But Chairman Peter Rodino (D., N.J.) said the committee already has enough evidence to reach "some conclusion" about whether Mr. Nixon should be impeached. He bluntly suggested that doubtful committee members "study" the 7,000 pages of "objective" evidence that have been presented by the committee's staff.

Rodino Gives Warning

"The American people have a right to expect us not to be dilatory," Rep. Rodino

told reporters. He warned against allowing the committee's proceeding to become "a circus or a trial."

The chairman thus reverted to a distinction that he has tried to make since the start of the impeachment inquiry: The job of the House is simply to conduct an investigation to see whether there's "probable cause" to remove Mr. Nixon from office; it's in the Senate that a full-fledged trial with witnesses must occur. Only after conviction in the Senate would the President be removed.

The five witnesses who will be called are: John Dean, the former White House counsel who is Mr. Nixon's chief public accuser; Frederick LaRue, a former White House aide; Alexander Butterfield, who installed the White House tape-recording system, and is Federal Aviation Administration chief; Herbert Kalmbach, who used to be Mr. Nixon's personal lawyer, and Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen.

In addition to Messrs. Dean and LaRue, Mr. St. Clair wanted to call H. R. Halde- man, the former White House chief of staff; John Mitchell, the former Attorney General; William Bittman, a lawyer for one of the original defendants in the Watergate break-in case, and Paul O'Brien, a lawyer for the President's ReElection Committee.

Instead, the committee voted to have its staff question these four, plus Charles Col- son, Mr. Nixon's former special counsel, to see if they have anything to say worth hearing. If they have, the committee could decide to summon them to testify.

Under the resolution adopted yesterday the committee could decide to hear witnesses past the July 12 deadline. But the present plan is to cut off the testimony on that date.

Timetable Is Listed

Under a schedule informally adopted by the Democrats, the committee will debate possible articles of impeachment the week of July 15 and vote on them the week of July 22. The panel will then direct its staff to write a report, which will go to the House early in August.

House members will have a week or so to study the report, before the House begins debating the committee's findings; the House Democratic leadership hopes to have a vote by the end of August or early September, at the latest.

Rep. Tom Raisback of Illinois, a Republican moderate who's considered a possible vote for impeachment, deplored "our rush to meet the deadline set by the House Democratic leadership." Rep. Hamilton Fish of New York, another GOP moderate, called "the witness thing far more important than any timetable."

But Rep. Jerome Waldie of California, one of the Democrats who has sponsored impeachment bills, accused the Republicans of trying to delay the proceeding. "They want to tie the committee up all summer questioning witnesses," Rep. Waldie declared.

Two Democrats voted with the committee's 17 Republicans for calling all 10 witnesses, Rep. Walter Flowers of Alabama and Rep. Wayne Owens of Utah.