

Panel to Vote Next Week on Impeachment

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After 10 weeks of deliberation and wrangling behind closed doors, the House Judiciary Committee will decide next week whether to recommend that the President of the United States be impeached.

Next Monday or Tuesday the committee will begin meeting in open sessions to debate and vote on articles of impeachment. Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) said a final committee vote is expected by next weekend.

A vote for impeachment by the committee, thus sending the issue to the full House, seems assured. The White House has virtually conceded a vote against President Nixon in committee, although some Nixon stalwarts such as Rep. Charles Wiggins (R-Calif.) insist that when the committee sits down to reflect on the evidence it will find no grounds to recommend impeachment.

Wiggins predicted Monday that no Republican on the committee will vote for impeachment. But Rep. Tom RAILSBACK (R-Ill.) said he knew of at least four who have not made up their minds. He said they are himself and Reps. William COHEN (R-Maine), Hamilton FISH (R-N.Y.) and Henry P. SMITH (R-N.Y.).

Almost all the 21 Democrats on the 38-member committee appear sure votes for impeachment—Rodino was quoted to that effect recently.

The crucial questions are whether the three Southern Democrats on the committee and some Republicans will join in an impeachment vote to give the vote a sufficiently bi-partisan look to push it through the House. If Reps. Walter FLOWERS (D-Ala.), James MANN (D-S.C.) and Ray THORNTON (D-Ark.) voted for impeachment it would make it a respectable vote for Southerners in the House who could go either way. Similarly if four or five committee Republicans voted for impeachment, it could bring along a number of wavering Republicans in the House.

Questions members must face up to are not only does the evidence show grave misconduct by the President, but the threshold

questions of what are impeachable offenses and what is the necessary standard of proof.

The President argues that the committee must find him guilty of a crime in the exercise of his office if it is to recommend impeachment. The committee staff and many scholars insist he can be impeached and removed from office for serious misuse of power which need not be an indictable crime, but might be much more serious to the welfare of the country.

Mr. Nixon's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, will briefly sum up the President's case against impeachment. For the rest of the week, the committee still will meet informally in closed session preparing for a week of debate and voting.

At these closed sessions, the impeachment staff will present "theories of the case." These will list each of the allegations against the President and detail evidence for and against the allegation. The charges include the Watergate cover-up, misuse of federal agencies to punish political enemies, improper actions in exchange for campaign contributions, the President's personal finances, break-ins by the White House "plumbers," bombing Cambodia and his contempt of the committee by defying its subpoenas.

The impeachment staff has been at work for weeks drafting possible articles of impeachment for committee consideration. Recently, Rodino created an informal Democratic task force to draft its own articles. Committee Republicans divided into task forces recently to bone up on different aspects of the case to prepare for next week's debate.

If a majority of the committee votes for impeachment, the issue is expected to go to the House floor about mid-August for two weeks' debate. If a majority of the House voted impeachment, the issue would move to the Senate where a two-thirds vote would be required to remove the President from office. Only one President has ever been impeached—Andrew Johnson in 1868—and he was acquitted in the Senate by a single vote.