

John Doar's Duty On Impeachment



David Broder

THE MEMBERS of the House Judiciary Committee are embarking on the most important fortnight of their political lives in a mood of nervous indecision that worries some of those who have shared the labors of the impeachment investigation with them.

Probably three-fourths of them have resolved in their own minds how they will vote as individuals on the case of President Nixon, when the fateful ballots are taken before the end of this month.

But the committee as a whole has not found, in the welter of facts it has been trying to digest, a coherent statement of the issues. Until it has that, it cannot bring the case to the House with enough confidence to persuade — or at least enlighten — the 397 other legislators who have not been through the same course of instruction the Judiciary members have received.

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CREATING that consensus has been the chief objective of Chairman Peter Rodino, (Dem-N.P.), since the committee reluctantly began the investigation last October.

Patience has been the principle on which Rodino has relied, but the physical and psychological strain of the marathon sessions have taken a toll on the members. The increasing workload has denied them the time for reflection on what it is they are about.

A very large responsibility now falls on that committee staff, and particularly on its chief for the impeachment inquiry, John Doar.

There is debate—even among those with the best vantage point — about

Doar's ability and readiness to raise his sights and sketch the outlines of the case in bold crayon strokes.

But if Doar does not do that soon, it is unlikely the necessary job will be done. There is no magisterial figure among the committee members who by force of intellect and personality has shown he can bring the issues into sharp focus. Those who speak most in committee sessions tend to be the more intense partisans among the junior members on both sides — the very members least likely to help shape that consensus.

Those whose views or questions are of greatest importance—the eight or nine “swing votes”—have been the most silent.

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OUTSIDE VOICES — editorialists, home town civic leaders, columnists, perhaps even the Supreme Court in its ruling on the tapes—may be of some help and influence. But the committee's main reliance is probably on its own counsel, Doar.

Yet, the counsel has given the impressions to staff colleagues that this is a role he is most reluctant to take—and one that may not, in his view, be needed at this time. He has suggested that the committee's function, and even the House's, is simply to forward the case to the Senate, if the members feel it worth doing, for the ultimate consideration there of the issues.

To construct a record on which the committee needs help from its counsel mate size, can go with confidence to the full House — is a duty of Doar's which may not be postponed to another day. The committee needs help from its counsel right now, and it deserves to get it.

Arthur Hoppe is on vacation