

Judiciary Debate to Go on TV

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The House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly yesterday to permit live television and radio coverage of the House Judiciary Committee's final debates on the impeachment of President Nixon.

The vote was 340 to 40 to open the committee's sessions to broadcast coverage and marks the first time that a House committee will be able to conduct a meeting—as opposed to a public hearing—with television cameras present.

A few hours later, the Judiciary Committee formally approved a resolution admitting the broadcast media to the debates, which are expected to

get under way Wednesday. The coverage would continue until the final votes on articles of impeachment, which could occur Saturday or the following week.

Although passed decisively in committee and on the House floor, the innovation drew some critical reaction from opponents who contended that broadcast coverage might distort the proceedings.

Rep. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.) claimed that "the public will get the mistaken impression that committee members were of one mind (on impeaching the President) from the beginning." The proceedings should have been open to television coverage when they began, he argued.

Other Republicans who generally oppose impeachment contended that Mr. Nixon's case will not receive as much attention as the pro-impeachment side because the President's counsel, James D. St. Clair, will not be present.

But the second-ranking Republican on the committee, Robert McClory (Ill.) assured the House that Mr. Nixon's case will be argued forcefully by Samuel A. Garrison Jr., now the minority counsel.

A last-minute attempt to keep high-powered television lighting out of the committee room was beaten in the committee's late-afternoon debate. Rep. John F. Seiberling (D-Ohio) said, "We are not going

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to sit here and sweat and be blinking our eyes while we're carrying out this very important responsibility."

But his anti-lighting amendment was whipped, 29 to 8, after Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) observed that House rules specifically allow necessary extra lights for committee sessions.

Twenty strong lights already are strung along the committee room's ceiling in preparation for the day when the sessions are open to broadcast coverage.

Rodino said he will work out details of coverage with the three networks. House rules prohibit commercial interruptions and any violations of that will be reported to the House, Rodino said.

Network spokesmen said there would be no national commercial interruptions while the committee is meeting. But they said they have no control over local stations, which may want to follow their regular commercial

schedules. Network commercials would be shown only when the committee is in recess.

The spokesmen also said the daily coverage would probably be rotated among ABC, CBS and NBC. On the day one network is showing the hearings, the other two would broadcast their usual fare.

The votes yesterday mark a sharp departure for House committees. The change in rules applies to all future committee meetings, not just to the Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry.

Any committee meeting will be open to broadcasting whenever a majority of the committee members wants it. Previously, hearings of witnesses could be broadcast, but the rules of the House were interpreted to mean that no committee had the right to open its formal meetings where debates are held and votes recorded.

In the committee, the vote was 31 to 7 in favor of admitting the broadcast media. Voting

against it were Democrats James R. Mann (S.C.), Seiberling, and Robert F. Drinan (Mass.) and Republicans Edward Hutchison (Mich.), Charles E. Wiggins (Calif.), David W. Dennis (Ind.), and Trent Lott (Miss.).

Drinan said he voted against television because he felt the discussions might "appear to be less than impartial and objective" to the viewing audience.

In the landslide vote on the House floor, all members of the Maryland and Virginia delegations voted in favor of televised meetings with the exception of David E. Satterfield III (D-Va.).

Rep. David T. Martin (R-Neb.) led the opposition, arguing that the Democratic side of the committee — having four more members than the Republicans — would get more television time.

He also observed that chief counsel John Doar—whom he called the "prosecuting attorney"—will be present but that St. Clair, who has led most of Mr. Nixon's legal fight in the

committee will not be. "This is completely unfair," Martin intended.

But McClory said that minority counsel Garrison—a strong partisan—according to McClory—will be present and added, "I'm confident he'll present the other side."

Anderson warned that with the "electronic box" present, committee members would be inclined to give their "foreordained" conclusions and said they should be permitted to make their final decisions on impeachment without television's presence.

House Minority Leader John Rhodes (Ariz.) reduced the Republican opposition by favoring televised meetings. But he called on Rodino to get assurances that the networks would provide continuous coverage without interruptions.

Rep. Wayne Owens (D-Utah), sponsor of the original resolution calling for television and radio broadcast, said that television coverage will keep the committee members "serious and alert."

Television, he asserted, has a tendency to reveal pomposity.