

Impeach Debate Starts Today

Washington

Senior Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee met privately yesterday to redraft proposed articles of impeachment in an attempt to elicit broad, bipartisan support for formal charges against President Nixon.

The action by the Democratic leaders, on the eve of formal committee debate on impeachment, coincided with the surprise announcement by a staunch Republican conservative representative Lawrence J. Hoagan of Maryland, that he will vote to impeach the President.

Spurred by Hogan's eleventh-hour statement — and by his estimate that "at least" five of the 17 minority members of the panel could be persuaded to join in recommending that the House impeach Mr. Nixon — the Democrats sought a formula for formal charges that would produce the widest Republican support.

Well-placed committee members said that an ad hoc drafting subcommittee, composed of representative Peter W. Rodino Jr. of New Jersey, the chairman, and three other Democrats, focused on the following two central articles of impeachment:

- That the President had played an active and central role in the Watergate cover-up attempt and thus violated his constitutional oath to enforce the nation's laws.

- That Mr. Nixon had seriously abused his presidential authority by defying subpoenas for Watergate evidence and by taking a variety of clandestine steps to eavesdrop on American citizens.

The Judiciary Committee's final deliberations — only the second in the nation's history to be directed at the possible impeachment of a President and first to be televised nationally — are scheduled to begin at 4:30

p.m. PDT today with the introduction of the proposed articles in final form and general debate on them.

As the committee prepared for the decisive debate, the atmosphere on Capitol Hill was, as House Republican leader John J.

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Rhodes of Arizona termed it, "highly volatile."

Four committee Republicans who are widely believed to be at least leaning toward votes for impeachment met privately yesterday morning to discuss the form of impeachment articles that they might be willing to endorse.

They are representatives Tom Railsback of Illinois, Hamilton Fish Jr. of New York, M. Caldwell Butler of Virginia and William S. Cohen of Maine.

One of the four, who asked not to be quoted by name, said that the discussion had been aimed at "educating the staff" of the committee

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on the proper form that impeachment articles should take if they are to win Republican backing.

Representative Jerome R. Waldie (Dem-Calif.) told reporters, in addition, that there were "a lot of little conferences going on" among committee members and lawyers. The most important reportedly were a caucus of the committee's 21 Democrats Monday night, at which strategy for the debate was discussed, and the deliberations yesterday of the Democrats' drafting subcommittee.

The committee already has before it, informally, five separate sets of proposed articles, one drafted by John M. Doar, the special counsel on impeachment, and four offered by various Democratic members.

In each case, the proposed articles contain adjectives giving harsh assessments of Mr. Nixon's conduct in office and they make such diverse allegations as willful underpayment of taxes by

the President and illegal bombing of Cambodia in secrecy.

Cohen of Maine who was, until Hogan's announcement, widely regarded as the Republican most likely to vote for impeachment, said that "none of the articles I've seen are something I'd want to recommend."

He said that they were "too loose" in their language and that they contained "statements I don't think are supportable by facts."

Representative George E. Danielson (Dem-Calif.) said that he expects Rodino and the ad hoc drafting subcommittee to refashion the articles into a "succinct, neat, clean" set of charges against Mr. Nixon.

Danielson said that they would elicit broader bipartisan support if the drafters "eliminate as many adjectives as possible."

For example, he said it would be sufficient to allege that the President had "concealed evidence" rather than to say he had "concealed evidence willfully and maliciously," thereby becoming "hung up with argument about what is malice."

The three other members of the drafting group are Democratic representatives Don Edwards of California, John Conyers Jr. of Michigan and Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland.

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