

The Mann in The Middle

Washington

The House Judiciary Committee's impeachment debate began 54 minutes late yesterday morning, 40 minutes late in the afternoon, and 47 minutes late in the evening, but the members had not overslept, and they were not enjoying long lunches.

Rather, two groups of weary congressmen and staff lawyers were meeting in hideaway offices — sometimes separately, sometimes together — for the tenth or 12th or 15th time in the last three days, casting and recasting articles of impeachment that they all could support.

As is so often the case in Congress, the serious negotiating and compromising were going on behind the scenes, outside the public forum.

"Abstractly, they all know what they want," a key staff member, red-eyed from lack of sleep, remarked during a lunch break when he had nothing but a paper cup of black coffee. "But, when they get it in writing, they get uptight."

The first group of drafters consists of liberal Democrats, committed from the beginning to the impeachment of President Nixon but convinced that a large bipartisan majority on the committee is needed to gain



REP. JAMES R. MANN
The key drafter

a majority in the full house.

The second group is composed of Republicans and Southern Democrats who, after agonizing for months, have decided to vote for impeachment if the right articles can be cast.

As the negotiations have reached their final stages, Representative James R. Mann, a 54-year old conservative Democrat from South Carolina, has emerged as the key figure in the drafting process.

In recent days, he has been the one with the pencil and the notepaper who has turned the offers and compromises of diverse commit-

tee members into articles of impeachment broadly acceptable.

Why Mann? How did this courtly, relatively junior congressman, who had never before assumed a leadership role in his three terms in Congress, become the principal architect of impeachment language?

"No other drafter appeared," Mann replied when he was asked these questions yesterday. But his colleagues said that he was too modest.

"He's awfully good at it. I've got a lot of faith in him," remarked Walter Flowers (Dem-Ark.).

Representative Don Edwards, a liberal Democrat from California, was more specific.

"He's a conservative Southern Democrat," Edwards said. "He comes from an area where Nixon has always shown great strength. He's still part of the mainstream of our party. He's a super lawyer. But, most of all, he's trustworthy. He has a kind of entre into the Republicans and the conservative Democrats that (Jerome) Waldie (Dem-Calif.) or Robert Drinan (Dem-Mass.) or I could never establish in a lifetime. He can go to them and say, 'I have the same problem as you in my district. I can support this. So can you.'"

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