

The impeachment torment of Railsback

Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON — "Everytime someone gave his vote it was like, boom, boom, boom, boom,—like a bell tolling."

Tom Railsback, a 42-year-old lawyer from Moline, Ill., the first Republican to vote to impeach Richard Nixon, was a tormented man.

"I remember the bulbs popping, the silence, and then the response each time, yes or no. It had to be the most dramatic moment of my life, and yet I can't be happy about it."

Minutes after the Judiciary Committee had voted, Railsback sat in his office and talked about what had brought him to his vote to impeach and how he felt about it.

"I never had my heart in this thing," he said. "I wasn't fooling when I said I didn't want to do it. Richard Nixon is my friend. He campaigned for me. He's always been nice to me. He's signed autographs for my daughter."

"I am not suggesting President Nixon be removed from office," Railsback said. "I'm just saying he must be called to account for his actions. I honestly hope he can exonerate himself. But that must be done in the Senate."

Railsback's decision was made bit by bit over the eight months during which the

Judiciary Committee studied the charges. But the irrevocable moment came two weeks ago after the committee members received the summary of evidence against the President.

"I spent 10 hours with it over the weekend," he said. "For the first time the President's role was no longer a fragmented, sporadic picture of ambiguous pieces of evidence. The picture took shape, and for the first time it became apparent to me what the President should have done, what he actually did do, and what his involvement was."

Once the decision was behind him, Railsback admitted he faced another conflict—what would an impeachment vote do to him politically.

"I knew then, and I know today, that I would be better off tonight, in a political sense, if I had voted against impeachment," he said.

Although Railsback says he was never pressured by other members of the House to vote against impeachment, he admitted "senior Republicans" or "old time party regulars," mostly in his own district, warned him against an impeachment vote.

"But I didn't find this among many of the younger party people, and I cast my lot with them," he said. "The White House is not the future of the Republican party."



Tom Railsback, R-Ill., whispers in Chairman Rodino's ear.