

New Predictions Of Impeachment

Washington

House minority leader John J. Rhodes suggested yesterday that a full-scale television defense of Mr. Nixon's conduct in office is now the "only viable possibility" for the President to avoid impeachment by the House.

The Arizona Republican offered that suggestion as House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. (Dem-Mass.), House Deputy Whip John Brademas (Dem-Ind.) and Senate Majority Whip Robert C. Byrd (Dem-W. Va.) all predicted impeachment.

Byrd said it was "not an absolute certitude," but O'Neill said "only a miracle" can save the President, and Brademas agreed.

Rhodes said in a telephone interview that he would take his first formal head-count of House Republicans on impeachment this week.

But he conceded that Saturday's 27 to 11 Judiciary Committee vote for the first count of impeachment, in which six Republicans joined the 21 Democrats, "is going to have some effect" in redrawing House Republican support of the President.

During the interview, the Arizona Republican put forward his proposal that Mr. Nixon take his case directly to the nation.

Rhodes said he had not been asked for advice by the President, but "if he were to ask me, I don't know of anything I could tell him to do except to go on television and exhaustively explore and refute the evidence. That is the only viable possibility I see."

Rhodes, who has not announced his own position on impeachment, indicated he



JOHN J. RHODES
House minority leader



AP Wirephoto
SEN. ROBERT BYRD
'House will impeach'

had completed his review of the evidence and would "probably have something to say this week."

The minority leader gave no indication of his learnings but it is conceded in Republican circles that if Rhodes should come out against the President, it would not only guarantee impeachment but trigger broad public demand

from other GOP leaders for Mr. Nixon's resignation.

Minority Whip Leslie C. Arends (Rep-Ill.), who is retiring this year and has been lobbying openly among Republican members against impeachment, said in an interview yesterday that the effect of the Judiciary committee vote would be "minor."

The No. 3 man in the Republican leadership, Representative John B. Anderson (Rep-Ill.), spoke in an interview of a "serious erosion" in the President's position.

Anderson, the chairman of the House Republican Conference, has opposed administration positions more frequently and criticized the President more freely than any of the others in the party leadership and is considered, therefore, a more likely pro-impeachment vote.

Anderson said he had suggested to then-White House counselor Bryce Harlow last October that the President "make an exhaustive and definitive refutation" of the accusations against him, by coming before a special joint session of Congress.

But he questioned the practicality of Rhodes' suggestion for a major residential address at this time.

"It would be enormously difficult for him . . . to refute 7000 pages of evidence," Anderson said. "The record of this case has largely been written, and for anyone to suggest that the President could change it, through some dramatic gesture like a Khrushchev-like, hours-long television production, is not realistic."

The fourth member of the House GOP Hierarchy, Policy Committee Chairman Barber B. Conable Jr., of New York, was not available for comment yesterday.

In an interview on ABC's "Issues and Answers," Senator Byrd said that if President Nixon refused to produce tapes or other evidence required for a Senate impeachment trial, it would "sound the death knell for the President so far as some senators are concerned, my vote being one."

The deputy Democratic leader said that "if the vote here to occur tomorrow in the Senate, the Senate would not convict. However, the possibilities for conviction, I think, are growing daily."

Byrd said the factors working against Mr. Nixon included the recent conviction of his former aide John Ehrlichman for perjury and conspiracy, the Supreme Court decision ordering him to turn over the tapes, "the continued stonewalling of the President through his counsel in refusing to give evidence to the House committee, and the vote of the House committee . . . on which conservatives and Republicans joined with Democrats to vote for an article of impeachment."

Washington Post