

Rhodes Suggests Nixon Take Case To People on TV

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Haig Confident

By Carroll Kilpatrick
and Morton Mintz

Washington Post Staff Writers

The White House chief of staff acknowledged last night that President Nixon's position has suffered "an erosion," but rejected assessments that impeachment by the House of Representatives is a sure thing.

"The case for impeachment is not there," Alexander M. Haig Jr. told an interviewer.

If the House were to impeach Mr. Nixon, would he resign to avoid the "trauma of a Senate trial?" Haig was asked.

"At this juncture, I see no value served in the interests of the people to have presidents driven out of office," he replied.

The White House staff chief appeared on the CBS television program "60 Minutes (WTOP). Mike Wallace had taped an interview with him in Los Angeles yesterday morning, only half a day after the House Judiciary Committee voted 27 to 11 to recommend the first impeachment of a President since 1868. Haig had been with Mr. Nixon in San Clemente, where Wallace also had interviewed him Friday night.

Wallace suggested that impeachment by the House seems "cut and dried," citing estimates by Democratic and Republican House leaders, the composition of the House—248 Democrats and 187 Republicans—and the vote of six of the 17 GOP members of the Judiciary Committee Saturday to recommend adoption of a first article of impeachment.

"We don't accept that," Haig said. I am confident that if the members of the House assess the charges against the President . . . against the hard evidence, they are going to find that the evidence is not there to sustain the kind of charges that are before the committee." The charges are "a grab bag of generalities," he said.

Wallace, asserting that White House estimates of the Watergate scandal and its impacts have been "consistently wrong" asked, "Why should anyone believe that you're not just whistling past the graveyard once again.

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'Only Possibility'

By David S. Broder

Washington Post Staff Writer

House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) 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.

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

Byrd said it was "not an absolute certainty," but O'Neill said "only a miracle" can save the President, and Brademas agreed. Both talked of a margin of 70 votes or more in the 435-member House.

Rhodes said in a telephone interview that he would take his first formal headcount 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 reducing House Republican support of the President.

"The imponderable is how much," Rhodes said.

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

The minority leader gave no indication of his leaning, but it is conceded in Republican circles that if Rhodes should come out against the President, it would not only guarantee impeachment but trigger a broad public demand from other GOP leaders for Mr. Nixon's resignation.

Others in the House Republican leadership are thought to be more likely to vote for impeachment, but their defection

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REACT, From A1

would be less significant for the President.

Minority Whip Leslie C. Arends (R-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."

"There possibly could be more Republicans inclined to support impeachment," Arends said, "but I think most of the guys . . . will stay steady."

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

Anderson, 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. He said yesterday that it would be "highly inappropriate" for him to disclose his stand.

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 presidential address at this time.

"It would be enormously difficult for him . . . to refute 7,000 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."

Anderson suggested that it might be "more beneficial" for Mr. Nixon to submit to Congress voluntarily the 64 White House tapes he was ordered to turn over to Judge John J. Sirica by last week's unanimous Supreme Court decision.

"That could improve the climate of opinion somewhat," Anderson said, "but I'm rather dubious you could reverse the present tide with any single gesture."

The fourth member of the

House GOP hierarchy, Policy Committee Chairman Barber B. Conable Jr., of New York, was not available for comment yesterday.

But in his latest newsletter to his Rochester-area constituents, Conable discussed the "chilling allegations now made against the President . . . relating to the use of the IRS and other agencies of government to harass public and private people whom his staff considered unfriendly."

"I expect to read the evidence about these allegations very closely," Conable said. "I fear and mistrust the power of big government, even when its intentions are beneficent . . ."

In an interview on ABC's "Issues and Answers," (WMAL), Sen. 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 were 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 D. 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."

House Majority Leader O'Neill made his comment that "only a miracle can prevent" Mr. Nixon's impeachment in an interview with a Boston radio station.

"I'd have to say that around 50 Republicans will vote to impeach him and I would say there will be 40 members of the Democratic Party who will not vote to impeach him," O'Neill said. "The difference would be somewhere around, I believe now, about 70 votes."

Brademas, the chief deputy Democratic House whip, said in an NBC interview that the margin for impeachment now looked to be between 70 and 100 votes but could grow much larger.

The House includes 248 Democrats and 187 Republicans.

Nixon Staff Chief Rejects View That Impeachment Vote Is Certain

PRESIDENT, From A1

Haig once more emphasized his belief that the evidence to sustain impeachment is insufficient, and he appealed to each House member to look to his conscience to see if the judgment of insufficiency is not correct.

Haig said it had long been felt in the White House that the Judiciary Committee would be a lost cause. He said that as early as February "there were discussions that perhaps we could hold three or four Republicans." Having held 11, the President did well, he suggested.

As Haig portrayed it, the committee is unrepresentative of the House. Eight of 37 members had voted against the nomination of then-House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford to be Vice President, he recalled.

"You say we have no strategy to defend the President," Haig told Wallace. "Of course, we have a strategy. Our strategy is to have those bodies that are dealing with it (impeachment), to deal with the facts and the evidence," and to try to "avoid the emotionalism and the kinds of groundswell . . . that foreclose on prejudice issues."

Wallace reminded Haig that a year ago, in an interview on "60 Minutes," he had said the American people are smart and finally will come up with the right judgement on Watergate.

Yet now, Wallace continued, the Gallup Poll indicates Mr. Nixon's popularity

to be at a record low, 24 per cent, and the Harris Survey shows a majority of the public believes the President not only should be impeached, but also convicted.

"I've always been suspicious of polls," Haig said, while emphasizing that "I do respect the American people" and that there can be "waves and swings" of opinion.

"I've been with this President through this nation in the past 12 months," Haig said. "It's very evident to me that the American people respect the institution of the presidency and the incumbent of that institution, and I am confident that when the final lines are drawn . . . justice will be done. And that's what the American people insist on."

Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon returned to Washington after two weeks in California "anguished" by the committee vote against him but determined to carry forward the uphill battle against impeachment in the House.

Before leaving San Clemente in the early afternoon, after 16 days at his home, the President was described by aides as confident in the ultimate outcome of the two-year-old Watergate crisis.

Declaring that Mr. Nixon has "a tremendous capacity of discipline," press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said the President has "no feeling of despair" and has not allowed "anger to overtake him."

"Certainly there is an-

guish," Ziegler said. "Certainly here is disappointment."

Ziegler asserted that it is incorrect to say "we have given up or that the President has given up."

Mr. Nixon still has a spirit of "determination and confidence," the press secretary said. The President is a man "with feeling and compassion" and this has been "a very tough" period, Ziegler acknowledged.

But he maintained that Mr. Nixon has made "a heroic and determined" effort to "buck up" friends, family and staff.

"What sustains his family and staff is that they know he was not involved in any conspiracy to obstruct justice," the press secretary said.

The President "has a determination to do the job," Ziegler said, "and he is confident that the full House will not duck its responsibility to examine the evidence with an open mind."

The President was walking on the beach near his San Clemente home with his daughter and son-in-law, Tricia and Edward Cox, during the final debate and vote in the House committee on the first article of impeachment on Saturday.

Ziegler reached the President while he was still on the beach to tell him of the 27-11 vote against him.