

...And the Timetable in Congress

It was Rep. Lawrence Hogan Jr. (R-Md.) who put into perspective the House Judiciary Committee's descent into wrangle and pettifog after the first day of noble exposition. Now, he said, we're letting the public see what our closed sessions have been like. Yet when the final vote came on Article 1, the sense of solemn responsibility was restored.

Whatever the motives, the delaying tactics of Rep. Charles W. Sandman Jr. (R-N.J.) and the others did nothing to help President Nixon's cause. The public has had Watergate right up to the neck. To wake up and discover one fine morning that it has gone away is the dream of most Americans.

In the closed circle around the President, there seems little or no understanding of the public mood. As so often, White House tactics are self-defeating. The President's counsel, James St. Clair, in responding to the 8 to 0 Supreme Court decision, spoke of how monitoring the 64 tapes and reading them for the grand jury would be "time consuming." It is fair

to ask why these steps were not taken long before in preparation for this eventuality.

The grim ordeal of impeachment still has months to go and that raises the question of how the House will handle the case. If the articles of impeachment come to the floor with a rule permitting amendments, debate can go on for far more than the 60 to 100 hours which is the outside estimate. That will be true particularly if television in the House encourages grandstanding for constituents back in the districts.

The truly grim prospect is the appalling length of time the process will take under the best of circumstances. From those anticipating a favorable vote of impeachment in the House, here is a probable timetable.

Short of stalling tactics, the House will meet the announced deadline and vote on August 23. The Senate will then go immediately into executive session to confirm the housekeeping details. This includes the seating of visitors and press, the requirements of television and other matters governing

the trial of a President for only the second time in history.

Most important in the closed session will be the vote on the time granted the President to prepare his defense. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield puts this at a maximum of three weeks. Minority Leader Hugh Scott believes it will be not less than four weeks. With that out of the way, the Senate in open televised session will hear the House managers, the term in the Constitution for the Representatives who will be in effect the prosecutors, to present the formal charges. That will take perhaps a full day.

After a Labor Day recess the Senate comes back to normal business until both prosecution and defense have completed their respective cases.

This means start of the actual trial on October 1. Optimists, Mansfield among them, say a vote can come as early as November 15. This allows for a three-day recess for the November 5 election. The pessimists, of whom Scott is one, are convinced the final vote on acquittal or conviction will be December 15 or later.

Hints are coming from White House strategists that if the vote comes after the election the President's chances of acquittal are good. Senators defeated or Republicans newly elected for a six-year term would feel free to vote their party loyalty and free the beleaguered President.

Thus the President's neck might be saved so he could complete his term, thanks to two or three votes beyond the one-third required for acquittal. But the wholly cynical tactic of prolonging the ordeal, perhaps even into 1975, will complete the public's distrust and disillusionment with all institutions of government. That is an intolerable price for keeping a crippled chief executive in office.

Those who must conduct the business of the trial which now seems inevitable speak of it with dread and something like horror. It is a nightmare they had never contemplated. But they are honorable men and they mean to go through with their constitutional responsibilities to the bitter end.