

Senate Leaders Prepare For Impeachment Trial

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WASHINGTON, July 29 — Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate took the first formal steps today to prevent trial on whether President Nixon should be removed from office.

After a two-hour meeting, the bipartisan leadership introduced — and the Senate quickly approved by voice vote — a resolution directing the Senate Rules Committee “to review any and all existing rules and precedents that apply to impeachment trials with a view to recommending any revisions, if necessary, which may be required if the Senate is called upon to conduct such a trial.”

The resolution, adopted without debate and with only a few Senators on the floor, directed the nine-member Rules Committee to conduct its review “entirely in executive sessions” and to report to the Senate by Sept. 1, or sooner if requested by the leadership.

‘Passing No Judgment’

“The Senate is passing no judgment at this time,” the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Montana, told reporters after his meeting with Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the minority leader; Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the Democratic whip, and Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, the Republican whip.

But, in light of the House Judiciary Committee’s vote last Saturday recommending the first article of impeachment against Mr. Nixon, Senator Mansfield said there was “no justification to delay” preparations for what could be the first impeachment trial of a President by the Senate since Andrew Johnson was acquitted by one vote in 1868.

The leaders also said they had instructed their staffs to prepare plans for the physical arrangement of the Senate chamber if the case was sent to the Senate for trial by a majority vote of the House of Representatives.

Limited TV Coverage

Mr. Mansfield said a separate resolution permitting limited television coverage of a Senate trial would be introduced “in the next day or so” and would also be considered by the Rules Committee.

Senator Mansfield said the decision whether to permit television cameras to cover a trial would be made by the full Senate, but that he favored such coverage under “very

strict bounds” with the cameras to be focused on the trial proceedings in the well of the Senate and with “no panoramics” of shots of individual Senators or spectators.

Mr. Scott, who is a member of the Rules Committee along with Mr. Byrd and Mr. Griffin, said he was not opposed to such television coverage. He added that a majority of the Senate might approve it but that the Republican Senators would have to consider the matter at a party conference.

Working Quietly

Up to now, the staffs of the Democratic and Republican leaders have been working quietly on possible procedures for a Senate trial. Until their meeting today, however, the leaders had sought to play down the matter on the ground that they did not want to anticipate what the House might do.

With the House committee’s approval Saturday of an article of impeachment against the President, Mr. Mansfield told reporters this morning, “We feel we have no choice but to become anticipatory.”

Senator Mansfield said the Rules Committee review would take into consideration changes in the Federal rules of civil and criminal procedure and any other changes “since the last Presidential trial over 100 years ago.” He added, “We want to be up to date.”

Rules Largely Unchanged

With the exception of a section added in 1935 permitting a committee of 12 Senators to take testimony and hear evidence in an impeachment trial, the Senate’s rules have been largely unchanged since they were adopted for the Johnson trial on March 2, 1868.

In the trial of a President, the Chief Justice presides over the Senate and a two-thirds vote is required to approve each article of impeachment.

The leaders said there had been no discussion at their meeting on how much time the Senate would allow the President’s lawyers to prepare their defense for a trial, or whether a Senate trial would carry over into next year.

“The President wants Watergate behind him,” Senator Mansfield said, “and we want Watergate behind us.”

“I agree with that,” Mr. Scott said. He also said he thought the public was “tired of the whole watergate process” and added, “Should it come to us, our obligation is to proceed expeditiously.”