

Rhodes to Hold Forums To Check Impeachment

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WASHINGTON, July 29 — Hoping to head off what could become a stampede for impeachment, the House minority leader, Representative John J. Rhodes of Arizona, is to announce later this week a plan to hold informal "rap sessions" for Republicans to debate the issue.

The Rhodes move comes at a time when some House Republicans report that sentiment in their ranks for impeachment of President Nixon is growing daily, with perhaps 60 of the 187 Republicans now prepared to vote aye.

"It looks like a runaway," a Northern Republican member said privately today. "I wouldn't be surprised to see a nearly two-to-one margin for impeachment."

Such a margin would exceed even the most recent estimate by the House Democratic leader, Representative Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts, that perhaps up to 40 Republicans would vote for impeachment and up to 40 Democrats would vote against. There are 248 Democrats in the House.

In a change of tone from last week, when White House assistants were accusing the members and staff of the Judiciary Committee of being un-

fair to the President, his deputy press secretary, Gerald L. Warren, said today that the White House was relying on the fairness of House members to clear the President. He said he felt that the members would "weigh the facts and evidence and not vote for impeachment." [Page 21.]

While there has not been an official head count by either party, Mr. Rhodes conceded today that last weekend's Judiciary Committee vote, in which six of the 17 Republicans joined all 21 Democrats in favor of the first article of impeachment, had weakened President Nixon's position in the House.

He said that, if asked for advice by the White House, he would recommend that Mr. Nixon take his case to the people with a one-hour or two-hour televised presentation, paid for by the Republican National Committee.

Mr. Rhodes said that he personally had not decided how to vote, but that he felt that the Judiciary Committee proceedings have been "a one-sided affair, to say the very least," and that Mr. Nixon's position has not been adequate-

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ly presented.

The 11 Republicans who argued against impeachment in the committee, he said, "did the best they could, but they were outnumbered."

In setting up "rap sessions" for party study and debate before the issue reaches the floor, Mr. Rhodes is apparently trying to achieve two objectives.

First, he wants to give Nixon supports a more adequate and private forum for defending the President in the crucial days prior to floor debate and voting.

Second, he is seeking to keep the party from being permanently scarred by division over the impeachment issue. He feels that such "rap sessions" can be so conducted that whatever bitterness is engendered by the division can be aired in those sessions, rather than on the floor.

"When I took over as minority leader, I felt that my main constituents, aside from my Arizona district, were Republican members of the House," he said today. "What I'm striving for is more unity within the party."

Possible Danger

The Rhodes plan for "rap sessions" could boomerang, however, particularly if hard-core Nixon supporters attempted to dominate the proceedings.

This is what happened in Republican caucuses on the Judiciary Committee when pro-Nixon forces began berating party members who were learning toward impeachment. As a result, moderate Republicans started holding seminars of their own, and out of these grew the pro-impeachment position taken by six committee Republicans last week.

Meanwhile, Representative G. V. Montgomery, Democrat of Mississippi, announced today that he would oppose impeachment.

"I am ready," he told the House, "to roll up my sleeves and work with those on the Judiciary Committee of a like mind in asking our colleagues from all sections of the nation to vote against the articles [of impeachment]."

Mr. Montgomery said that "alleged misconduct is indeed a serious matter" but equally serious "is the damage we do to our nation and the office of the President."

Despite Mr. Montgomery's stand, pro-Nixon sentiment among conservative Southern Democrats in the House appears to be fading.

The Nixon forces had been counting heavily on Representative Joe D. Waggoner Jr., a Louisiana Democrat who is unofficial leader of his party's Southern Conservatives, to keep this sizable bloc in line.

Mr. Waggoner now concedes that there has been "some slippage," particularly among the newer, younger Democrats from the South. The pro-impeachment votes on the Judiciary Committee by three



Associated Press

John J. Rhodes

Democrats, Walter Flowers of Alabama, Ray Thornton of Arkansas and James R. Mann of South Carolina, and one Republican, M. Caldwell Butler of Virginia, could influence Southerners of both parties, Mr. Waggoner said.

Asked what his own stand was, Mr. Waggoner replied: "Let's say, I would hate to vote for impeachment." Asked if that meant he was undecided, he said: "I wouldn't say that. I just don't want to lock myself in."

Plans for TV

While the Judiciary Committee has not completed its actions, House leaders began drawing up tentative plans today for floor debate.

The House Rules Committee will hold a hearing tomorrow on resolutions to permit television and radio broadcasting of impeachment proceedings on the floor. House leaders have not taken a position on this matter.

Speaker Carl Albert said today that he hoped that the House would begin debating impeachment about Aug. 12 or Aug. 14. The Oklahoma Democrat said that about two weeks would be set aside for the debate.

Meanwhile, the House passed and sent to the Senate today a resolution calling for printing 5,000 additional sets of the Judiciary Committees impeachment hearings and 10,000 copies of the committee's final report.

An earlier resolution, calling for 20,000 additional copies of the hearings and 50,000 copies of the report, was defeated several weeks ago because of the estimated cost: \$989,094. The estimate bill for the lesser number approved today is \$341,137.