

Oppose Vote To Impeach

By Lou Cannon

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Only 14 of the 187 Republicans in the House of Representatives are willing to say that they oppose the impeachment of President Nixon.

A survey of congressional offices by The Washington Post showed the vast majority of Republican members list themselves as undecided on the impeachment issue.

The survey, taken after the House Judiciary Committee voted three articles of impeachment, found 116 Republicans who said they were undecided, 10 favoring impeachment, 13 leaning toward impeachment and 16 leaning against impeachment. Fourteen GOP members declined to comment while four made no response to the inquiry.

Members of the House Judiciary Committee were not polled. The 14 Republicans opposing impeachment included the 10 GOP committee members who voted against all five proposed articles of impeachment while the nine members favoring impeachment included the seven House members who voted for at least one article.

The refusal of most Republicans to commit themselves apparently reflected both the President's continu-

See POLL, A4, Col. 2

POLL, From A1

ing erosion in the House on the impeachment issue and the desire of many members to reserve a decision until they personally have reviewed the evidence.

"What I'm going to do is what the Judiciary Committee did — examine all the evidence," said Rep. Joseph McDade of Pennsylvania in a comment typical of undecided Republicans. "It's what I do any only bill. I plan to do it even more carefully in this case."

Many of the undecideds reflected with grim humor the desperation felt by a large number of Republican candidates this year as they struggle to escape being carried down at the polls by public reaction to the President.

"I'm standing up straight and tall and not leaning in any direction," said fresh-

man Rep. Clair Burgener of California, whose district includes the presidential residence at San Clemente. "I'd have been better off to come up here during the Civil War."

Another Californian, Rep. Victor Veysey, used an old baseball expression to characterize his predicament: "Take two and hit to right."

And Rep. Guy Vander Jagt of Michigan, who lists himself as undecided although he is considered by some Republicans to be a prospective impeachment vote, tells of what happened when he appeared as a character witness in the trial of former Nixon aide John D. Ehrlichman.

"My opponent said I should disqualify myself because testifying to Ehrlichman's character showed I had made up my mind on impeachment," Vander Jagt said with a chuckle. "I said, wow, that's a good idea and wanted to race to the phone and accept his proposal."

Vander Jagt will not disqualify himself, of course. He and a majority of his colleagues apparently have decided that there is no advantage for Republicans in the impeachment issue no matter what they do, a conclusion that leaves most of them free to vote the evidence as they see it.

"It's such a loser it liberates people to do what's right" is the way Rep. Alan Steelman of Texas puts it.

Some Republicans are fearful of even hinting how they might vote, in the belief they will be swayed by the response.

"It's more difficult to be objective when you let people know what you're thinking, and they begin to call all the time," says freshman Robin Beard of Tennessee. "It then becomes more a matter of political survival than of the evidence."

One reflection of GOP sensitivity is the unwillingness of those Republicans

who are leaning toward impeachment to allow their names to be used for attribution.

Three Republicans outside the Judiciary Committee who openly favor impeachment are two of the congressmen who briefly opposed Mr. Nixon for the Republican presidential nomination in 1972—John Ashbrook of Ohio and Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey of California—and Jame P. Johnson of Colorado.

Four Republican members outside the committee who say they oppose impeachment are Earl Landgrebe of Indiana, Ancher Nelsen of

Minnesota, Louis A. (Skip) Bafalis of Florida, and Steven D. Symms of Idaho.

"I'm going on the supposition that the man is innocent until proven guilty, and so far I've seen no evidence presented that would make me think he's guilty," Symms said.

The large number of undecided votes was viewed by some Republicans as indicative of Mr. Nixon's precarious position in the forthcoming impeachment vote. One Republican who asked not to be identified said that congressmen who intend to vote for impeachment will "save themselves a lot of grief with the loyalists back home" if they patiently look at the evidence before announcing any decision.

Republicans gave varying evaluations about the attitudes of their constituents as reflected in the impeachment mail.

"All the letters have been strident," said Steelman. "Those in the middle are not writing."

Some congressmen said their impeachment mail had been heavy for a time but now has fallen off to only a few letters each week.

"It's the hush that comes over a crowd when they see the storm approaching," says Rep. Albert H. Quie of Minnesota.

Quie observed that many Democrats are exploiting impeachment by telling their constituents—over and over again—that they will not use the impeachment vote as a campaign issue.

"I had a colleague come to me and say, 'Isn't it great, my opponent says he isn't going to make this an issue,'" Quie said. "I told him, you just watch how many times he says it."

Many of the congressmen who bother to tabulate their mail say that it is evenly divided on impeachment. This adds to the feeling widely shared among Republicans that they stand to lose support no matter which way they vote.

Up to now, the mail has been heavily directed toward Judiciary Committee members, where most of the seven Republicans who voted for impeachment said they have received majority approval from those constituents who have written. But there also are signs of opposition.

The other day when he returned from the House floor to his office, impeachment supporter Rep. William S.

Cohen of Maine found that his staff had taped one particularly pungent letter to his chair.

"May a thousand camels relieve themselves in your drinking water," he letter said.

It is, as many Republicans say, a no-win situation.

Liz Donovan, Stuart Auerbach, Austin Scot, Jane Rippetean and Gail Robinson contributed to this story.