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Griffin Tells Nixon It's Time to Resign

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Assistant Senate Republican Leader Robert P. Griffin, a moderate republican who has long been a strong backer of President Nixon, called on the President yesterday to resign his high office in "both the national interest and his own interest."

Griffin, a close political associate of Vice President Gerald R. Ford, is the highest-ranking GOP figure to call openly and flatly for Mr. Nixon's resignation.

Speaking in a low voice, the Michigan senator made his statement as he emerged from a meeting of the Senate Rules Committee, which held closed hearings yesterday on rules and procedures to govern the expected impeachment trial of President Nixon. In the Senate it is taken as a foregone conclusion that the House will vote impeachment by a wide margin.

Griffin indicated that he believes Mr. Nixon may yet reach a decision to surrender from office voluntarily, rather than suffer the loss of pensions and benefits, the disruption of the country and other difficulties which would come with Senate conviction and ouster.

But Griffin said later in the day, after a GOP leadership meeting with presidential attorneys James D. St. Clair and Fred Buzhardt to review information about newly released White House tapes, that the two presidential spokesmen had made clear that Mr. Nixon doesn't intend to resign now.

"I'm disappointed at the decision that's been made to stay on," Griffin told reporters after the meeting in the

office of Senate Republican Leader Hugh Scott (Pa.).

Griffin's statement reflects openly what many GOP senators have been saying privately—that it would be in the best interests of the country, the party and Mr. Nixon if he resigns now and saves the nation the shock and disruption of a prolonged Senate trial which increasingly appears highly likely to result in his conviction.

Griffin said: "I think we've arrived at a point where both the national interest and his own interest would best be served by resigning. It's not just his enemies who feel that way. Many of his friends, and I count myself one of them, believe now that this would be the most appropriate course. Needless to say, this would be an awesome and very difficult decision for him to reach but I believe he will see it that way too."

Calls for Mr. Nixon's resignation were made several months ago by Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.), who repeated it yesterday, Sen. James L. Buckley (Cons.-R-N.Y.), and Sen. Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.). Several other Republicans, such as Marlow Cook (R-Ky.), House GOP Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) and House GOP Conference Chairman John B. Anderson (R-Ill.) have suggested Mr. Nixon consider resigning, but without making an outright call on him to do so.

In the House yesterday, Rep. Robert McClory (R-Ill.) said, "The President should give careful consideration to his resignation. The alternative would be the most distressing situation our country has ever experienced." McClory said that if the resignation isn't for coming,

"It's only a question of his personal stubbornness, personal stonewalling."

Sen. Peter Dominick (R-Colo.) told CBS News that a resignation "would both help the party and keep his retirement (pension), which I think he well deserves."

However, Democrats, who fear that if Mr. Nixon resigns without admitting guilt they could be accused of "hounding him out of office," responded more cautiously, saying they believe the trial should take place to establish the facts.

Sens. Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.), Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), and Frank Moss (D-Utah) all said the trial should go ahead, although Moss said that if the House goes on record by better than 2-to-1 for impeachment, "then he should resign." That would constitute an official recognition of the President's guilt sufficient to ward off "hounded out" charges later, Moss said.

Although the Senate Rules Committee will continue hearings again today, it appears that a consensus has built up on the committee against making any major changes in the existing 106-year-old impeachment trial procedures other than allowing live television.

Despite demands by many senators that standards of proof of guilt and admissibility of evidence be written into the trial rules, the committee appears almost certain to reject such proposals, on the theory that the impeachment trial isn't a criminal trial but a special legislative proceeding which needn't follow courtroom procedures.

This would leave it up to the presiding officer (Chief Justice Warren Burger, who

would sit in the chair in an impeachment trial of a President) to rule on admissibility of any piece of evidence, subject to reversal by a majority vote of senators present.

It would leave it up to each senator whether he wanted to cast a "yea" vote for conviction only if he felt the proof of guilt is beyond a reasonable doubt (the criminal trial standard), or whether he'd be satisfied with the lesser standard of "clear and convincing evidence."

It is beginning to appear that the Chief Justice, who voted on procedural matters in the 1860 trial of Andrew Johnson to break ties, won't be deprived of this right in the Nixon trial.

He'd continue to be barred from voting on the guilt or innocence of the President.

If the President were finally found guilty by a two-thirds vote, however, then a separate majority vote would be needed on a resolution to bar him permanently from all other future federal jobs. It appears that the Rules Committee will bar the Chief Justice from breaking a tie on such a resolution.

Byrd told reporters he will offer a motion to require the Senate to vote up or down on any article of impeachment as a whole—forbidding separate votes on each of the several items within the article. Precedents from past trials would let the Senate move to a separate vote on each of, for example, the nine separate items in Article I of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment resolution, and a two-thirds "yea" on any one of these nine could oust Mr. Nixon from office.