

GOP Leaders Seen Voting To Impeach

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The bottom fell out of any effort to save President Nixon from impeachment yesterday after he admitted he had been involved in the Watergate cover-up for nine months before he previously had insisted he was aware of it.

House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill (D-Mass.) said a "tidal wave is going against the President" and predicted there would be no more than 75 votes cast against impeachment by the 435-member House.

House Republican leaders indicated they were ready to vote for impeachment after the President admitted that he had withheld relevant information from the House Judiciary Committee impeachment inquiry and had misled the committee.

Rep. Charles E. Wiggins (R-Calif.), a leading defender of the President on the Judiciary Committee, said Mr. Nixon should resign or be impeached. Rep. Wiley Mayne (R-Iowa) also announced a shift to favor impeachment, and others of the 10 Judiciary Committee Republicans who voted against impeachment said they were reassessing their positions.

Among those expressing doubts about their positions of support for the President were Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.), ranking minority member of the House Judiciary Committee; Rep. Charles W. Sandman (R-N.J.), and Rep. Delbert Latta (R-Ohio).

News of the President's statement produced a flurry of activity among Republicans on the House floor. They gathered in small, animated groups in the aisles and some quickly began dictating statements withdrawing support from the President or announcing they would reassess their positions.

"It's like a mutiny on a ship," said Rep. Earl Landgrebe (R-Ind.), a conservative supporter of the President. "A sort of madness has set in." Landgrebe said he still supports Mr. Nixon.

Wiggins, the man many Republicans had looked to for leadership, told reporters standing just off the House floor, "Everybody is in a state of semi-shock."

House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.), who had postponed because of a sore throat a scheduled news conference yesterday morning to announce his position on impeachment, called "shocking" the "apparent attempt to use the CIA to cover up the depth of the Watergate conspiracy."

"The fact that the President's veracity is put in ques-

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tion by this disclosure is a tragedy," Rhodes said. "It seems to me that this disclosure makes a quick House vote on impeachment an imperative in the best interests of our country."

Rhodes rescheduled his news conference for Wednesday.

House Speaker Carl Albert said "the most devastating thing that can be said of it (the President's statement) is that it speaks for itself."

For the first time, Albert in effect predicted that the House will impeach the President by saying he wouldn't argue with Mr. Nixon's assessment that impeachment by the House is virtually a foregone conclusion.

Rep. Barber B. Conable Jr. (R-N.Y.), fourth-ranking House GOP leader as chairman of the Republican Policy Committee, had been reading the evidence trying to reach a decision on how to vote. Yesterday's statement by the President, said Conable, "looks like a smoking gun to me." This was a reference to the argument made by the President's supporters that to impeach him his opponents must find a murder weapon in his hand.

Conable said it was clear from the President's statement that he was aware of and participated in the Watergate cover-up on June 23, 1972, six days after the break-in. Mr. Nixon has insisted he first learned of the cover-up nine months later on March 21, 1973.

"If the transcripts [of the June 23 tapes] are as he says, I will vote for impeachment on Article I [obstruction of justice]," said Conable. "I don't approve of leaders who mislead."

Rep. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.), third-ranking House Republican leader as chairman of the party conference, said, "the President admits he was motivated to cover-up involvement by the Committee to Re-elect the President." Anderson, the House GOP leader least beloved by the White House over the last five years and the one considered most likely to vote for impeachment until yesterday, said he would announce his decision in due course.

House Majority Whip John J. McFall (D-Calif.)

called the President's statement "incredible."

"His strongest supporters in the House are very upset by the news," McFall said. "This pulls the rug out from under them. I should think that anyone could now vote for impeachment without fear. He admits he was involved in the cover-up since June 23. He is almost pleading nole contendere (not contesting the charge)."

Rep. Joe D. Waggonner (D-La.), leader of the President's conservative Southern Democratic supporters which have already been cut to about two dozen by pro-impeachment votes by three Southern Democrats on the Judiciary Committee, said: "The only thing I can say is: It hurts. I want to let the dust settle before I say anything more."

"His back is against the wall," said Rep. John Brademas (D-Ind.), chief deputy House majority whip.

Rep. George Danielson (D-Calif.), a strong pro-impeachment vote on the Judiciary Committee, said: "It's just all falling apart, bursting like a dam. I don't see how he can survive. Here he admits that nine months before he previously admitted knowledge, he knew and participated."

Probably the members most shocked by the President's statement were the 10 Judiciary Committee Republicans who fought for him to the end, not knowing that in May he had listened to tapes that showed he ordered the Watergate cover-up on June 23, 1972.

Wiggins, who led the legal defense of the President in the Judiciary Committee, said the facts now establish "beyond a reasonable doubt that on June 23, 1972, the President personally agreed to certain actions, the purpose and intent of which were to interfere with FBI investigation of the Watergate break-in." Wiggins said these facts are "legally sufficient" to sustain "at least one count against the President of conspiracy to obstruct justice."

Wiggins called on the President to resign and concentrate his immediate efforts not on preparing his defense at a Senate trial but on a "speedy and orderly transition of power to the Vice President."

Should the President not resign, said Wiggins, "I am prepared to conclude that

the magnificent career of public service of Richard Nixon must be terminated involuntarily and shall support those portions of Article I of the bill of impeachment adopted by the Judiciary Committee which are sustained by the evidence."

Wiggins also disclosed that he had been told of the bombshell when he was called to the White House last Friday. He met there with Alexander M. Haig Jr., chief of staff, and the President's attorney, James D. St. Clair. Wiggins said he did not know why he had been informed ahead of time. "I was just told there was something I ought to know," he said.

Wiggins also said he called Rhodes yesterday morning to warn him not to make a public statement on impeachment until he had been briefed by the White House. Rhodes, by the time Wiggins called, already had canceled a news conference scheduled for yesterday in which he was expected to reveal his position on impeachment.

O'Neill said of Mr. Nixon's statement: "Confession is good for the soul but it doesn't save the body in this instance."

Sandman, who defended the President at every turn in the Judiciary Committee and repeatedly demanded specific proof at its televised meetings, called the President's statement "devastating" and said he will consider supporting Article I charging obstruction of justice.

Mayne, a committee member who had criticized Mr. Nixon for misuse of the Internal Revenue Service but wound up voting against ev-

ery article of impeachment, said yesterday:

"The President has today admitted deceiving the American people, the Judiciary Committee and his own lawyers. This is direct evidence that he not only withheld relevant information shortly after the Watergate break-in but also intentionally misled our committee throughout the long impeachment inquiry. I have not yet been furnished the withheld transcripts, but the President's own statement of what they contain makes a case for impeachment, and I will so vote in the full House."

Rep. Joseph Maraziti (R-N.J.) became the third of the President's 10 supporters on the Judiciary Committee to announce that he will now vote on the House floor for impeachment on the Article I obstruction of justice charge because of the President's statement.

Hutchinson, senior committee Republican who defended Mr. Nixon all the way even to the point of refusing to vote for subpoenas demanding tapes from the President, also said yesterday he was reassessing his position. Similar statements came from such committee supporters of the president as Henry P. Smith (R-N.Y.) and Carlos Moorhead (R-Calif.).

Said Smith: "I voted against impeachment on the evidence. This may change my mind. It is reprehensible—the President should have told his lawyers and the committee."

Rep. David Dennis (R-Ind.) said he wanted to read the transcripts of the June 23, 1972, tapes before making any comment.



Associated Press

Presidential lawyer J. Fred Buzhardt, left, and White House aide William Timmons leave Capitol after meeting senators and congressmen. It was Buzhardt's first public appearance since suffering a heart attack June 14.