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Representatives listen to White House tapes. Far side of table, from left: Mark Andrews, Tom Beville, Howard W. Robison and John Y. McCollister. Near side: Ronald A. Sarasin and H. John Heinz 3d, back to camera.

## House Members Start 5 Days of Listening to Tapes

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 5 —

For 397 members of the House of Representatives, today was the day they could start hearing the evidence for themselves.

Starting at 9 A.M. today and running for some 12 hours a day until after 9 P.M. Friday, there will be a more or less continuous hearing of 19 conversations between President Nixon and various White House aides, running simultaneously in four guarded hearing rooms in two House office buildings.

These rooms — two in the Cannon Building and two in the Rayburn Building — have been outfitted with sound equipment, long tables for reading the transcripts and taking notes while listening, 204 headsets, and a member of the Capitol police force, complete with a 38-caliber police special at his hip, to stand by the door.

Until today, only the 38 members of the House Judiciary Committee had heard these tape recordings, whose release to the rest of the House members was accompanied by 18 volumes of evidence, the basis for the three articles of impeachment that the House will begin to debate Aug. 19.

On this first day's schedule were four tapes, including a June 20, 1970 Dictabelt recording in which the President recalled conversations

held with aides about the Watergate break-in three days earlier. Later in the week, the Representatives will be able to listen to Mr. Nixon's March 21, 1973, conversations about the possibility of paying hush money to E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of those convicted in the break-in, and a March 22, 1973, discussion in which the President advised his aides to "stonewall it" and refuse to provide further information.

From the initial reactions of some of the House members who listened to today's tapes, it seemed that Mr. Nixon's guilt or innocence was in the ear of the listener.

"I didn't hear anything that suggests the President had any inkling that anything was amiss in the White House," said Representative Jack Edwards, a Republican from Alabama who said he wanted to vote against impeachment.

But Edward I. Koch, a New York City Democrat, found that: "It just confirms what I've been hearing from other sources all along—the tawdriness of it. There are a lot of low-class people in that White House."

Republican Ronald V. Dellums, a California Democrat, on his way back to Room 2168B in the Rayburn Building after a brief break between sessions, said: "It just sounds like a Gestapo meeting." He said he planned to listen to "every word" of the 19 tapes, and that he and his

staff "will try to read as much of the documentation as we can."

Inside the large, sunny room, with creamy walls and coral drapes that is normally a lounge for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, there are long tables and headsets with individual volume control. Each member is supplied with a copy of the committee's transcript of the tape that is being played. Some members, it is said, were overheard talking back to Mr. Nixon as they listened.

E. G. Shuster of Pennsylvania, a freshman Republican Representative, admitted that some of the tapes were "awfully hard to hear," but that listening to the actual voices "made it a lot more human, more real, more coherent." Mr. Shuster, who said he had not yet committed himself, remarked that he had heard "nothing that surprised me."

### Getting It in Context

But, he said: "It's my duty to them. I may well listen two or three times. It's so important, you really have to have everything in context, got to prepare yourself."

Unless a listener is armed with some knowledge of the context, he said, it is "so confusing" just to put on the headset and start listening.

Last weekend, he said, he took literally a suitcaseful of material home to his district

to study, and he added: "I'm starving for the committee report. That's got to be so important."

For another Republican, Representative George M. O'Brien of Illinois, it was the "dramatic impact" of the tapes.

"It's so much more intelligible to hear it than to read it," said Mr. O'Brien, who declares himself uncommitted. But still, he said, "what I heard today didn't do much to help me reach a decision."

And for still another in Mr. Nixon's party, the net effect of listening to three hours' worth of tapes was "damn discouraging." Representative Peter A. Peyser of Westchester County went on to say: "You begin to realize the conniving, the things you wouldn't think a President would be dealing with."

Carl Albert, the Speaker of the House, said he did not plan to spend any time with a headset on, explaining, "I think the transcripts I've read have given me what's there."

But Representative Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts, the majority leader, probably spoke for most of his House colleagues on both sides of the aisle, committed or wavering, when he said: "There's no question I'll go over and listen to some of them. This is an historic event and I want to participate as much as possible."

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