

Rhodes Will Vote To Impeach; House To Curtail Debate

By Richard L. Lyons and William Chapman
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Support for President Nixon almost totally collapsed in the House yesterday as Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) announced he will vote for impeachment and the bipartisan leadership moved to speed up the impeachment process.

Rhodes told a news conference he decided to vote for Article I, charging the President with obstruction of justice for involvement in the Watergate cover-up, after reading the transcripts Mr. Nixon released Monday. These showed the President's participation in the cover-up nine months before he had previously insisted he had been aware of it.

Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.), Rhodes and other House leaders agreed informally yesterday afternoon to cut in half the time for debating impeachment on the House floor. The debate, which the House Rules Committee recommended yesterday be open to live television, would begin as scheduled Aug. 19, but would be completed in one week instead of two.

The tidal wave of pro-impeachment sentiment that raced through the House after release of the new damaging transcripts took most of the fight and all of the suspense out of the impeachment issue and persuaded the leaders it wouldn't require so much time to decide.

Rhodes said not one Republican House member voiced support of the President to him yesterday.

The President has at least one defender left in Rep. Earl F. Landgrebe (R-Ind.), a conservative who often casts a lone opposition vote in House roll calls on spending legislation.

"I'm sticking by my President even if he and I have to be taken out of this building and shot," Landgrebe told reporters.

There was a chorus of requests that the President resign and spare Congress and the country the ordeal of impeachment. Rhodes, however, refused to join the call for resignation, saying this was a decision the President should make alone.

The President stood virtually alone. By yesterday afternoon all 10 Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee who had voted against impeachment had turned around and announced they would vote in favor of at least the obstruction of justice article. On this article the committee now stands 38 to 0.

Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.), who led a compromise move to censure the President last week, abandoned that position in favor of impeachment. Conservative Southern Democrats such as Rep. John J. Flynn Jr. (D-Ga.), who had demanded firm proof of criminal conduct as their standard of impeachable conduct, were announcing their support of impeachment. Rep. Wilmer (Vinegar Bend) Mizell (R-N.C.), who was considered an all-out defender of the President, announced for impeachment, saying "It is now clear that the President has acted in a manner unworthy of the highest office in the land."

Some members were predicting that no more than

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30 of the 435 House members would stay with the President and vote against Article I.

The Judiciary Committee recommended that Mr. Nixon also be impeached on two other charges—that he misused federal agencies to violate rights of citizens and for defying committee subpoenas to turn over material for the impeachment inquiry. Both articles are expected to be approved by the House, but perhaps by lesser margins.

The new evidence relates chiefly to Article I on obstruction of justice, though it also involved misuse of the CIA and FBI covered in Article II.

Rhodes called the transcripts released Monday "cataclysmic." He said he had been prepared to vote against Article I until he read them. He explained his decision in these words:

"The most important aspect of our entire system of government is equal justice under the law—the principle that no person—ordinary person or President—is above the law. Cover-up of criminal activity and misuse of federal agencies can neither be condoned nor tolerated."

Rhodes expressed no interest in the proposal advanced by some leading Democrats that Congress might grant Mr. Nixon immunity from criminal or civil prosecution in exchange for his resignation. Rhodes said he did not believe Congress had the constitutional power to grant immunity.

Reps. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.) and Barber Conable (R-N.Y.), the third and fourth ranking House Republicans, also announced their support for impeachment yesterday and expressed similar reservations about immunity. They added the suggestion that it might

not be "appropriate," because it would suggest that the President is above the law.

Only the veteran Republican whip, Rep. Leslie C. Arends (R-Ill.), among House GOP leaders declined to take a public stand for impeachment. But he predicted the House would vote to impeach the President.

Rep. Robert Michel (R-Ill.), chairman of the House Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, said he would vote for impeachment and said he was opposed to the President's resigning until the House has had a chance to vote. Michel's job is to elect more Republicans to the House, a task considered easier if Mr. Nixon is out of office by fall.

"We ought to see it through the House," said Michel. "We have to have an extended unfolding of what was the final nail in the coffin, to let the admission of culpability sink in."

Rhodes was asked if there was any way the President could survive and remain in office.

"Maybe," he replied, "But at the moment I couldn't tell you what it is."

Asked if he felt the President had been "out of touch with reality" in his dealings with Congress on impeachment, Rhodes said: "I think he has been, but I think he is now being more carefully briefed."

Rhodes had scheduled his news conference for Monday morning but postponed it because of a sore throat and a warning that new evidence was to be made available. Rhodes would not say what he would have announced if he had made his statement as scheduled.

He said he changed his mind from opposition to support of Article I on Monday, is still opposed to Article III on defiance of subpoenas, and is undecided on Article II charging misuse of agencies. He said he has a

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problem with the charge of misuse of the Internal Revenue Service to harass political enemies because nothing was accomplished.

Rep. Dave Martin (R-Neb.), a member of the party leadership in his role as senior Republican on the House Rules Committee, said he would vote to impeach on Article I, but would prefer the President resign.

Rep. Peter H. B. Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), a senior Republican called the latest disclosures "an appalling betrayal" of the President's responsibility to the country and called for resignation or impeachment.

Rep. Robert C. McEwen (R-N.Y.) said he agreed with Mr. Nixon's assessment that impeachment was virtually a foregone conclusion, and said he would vote for it.

Rep. John N. Erlenborn (R-Ill.), a leading member of the Midwestern moderate-conservative bloc, said he would vote for both Articles I and II.

Rep. Charles W. Whalen Jr. (R-Ohio) said he would vote to impeach because "in his own words the President has admitted that he authorized and ordered obstruction of justice."

Speaker Albert still declined to take a position on resignation or impeachment, feeling apparently that though a Democratic leader he is also the presiding officer of the House, pledged to protect rights of all members and to stay above the battle.

House leaders met in mid-afternoon and agreed informally that the impeachment timetable could be cut at least in half. Albert said there would be only about 25 hours of general debate, instead of the 55 hours originally planned.

The proceeding still is to get under way on Aug. 19, is to last daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and will probably be finished by Aug. 23 or 24, a week earlier than originally scheduled.

Time could be reduced, Albert said, "because we have a new desire on the part of members to get this job over as quickly as we can."

He said that Mr. Nixon's statement on Monday "had something to do with the members' desire to expedite this."

After the 25 hours of general debate, the House would take up each of the three articles separately and vote on each of them. Earlier, the leadership had indicated that votes on each paragraph of the articles would be permitted. But Albert said yesterday that the final rule might prohibit that and allow votes only on a complete article.

Some members hoped the debate could get under way even before Aug. 19, but Albert said logistical problems and a delay in writing the report would prevent that.

He said committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) believed the final report cannot be placed in members' hands until next Tuesday or Wednesday. Then the Rules Committee would meet on Wednesday or Thursday to vote out the rule governing debate on the House floor.

The Judiciary Committee is to meet this Friday to write the final report. That process was delayed for several days because Republicans who voted against impeachment will want time to write sections explaining why they changed their minds.

After Mr. Nixon's statement was made public Monday, the 10 committee Republicans who opposed impeachment began, one by one, announcing that the new evidence required a vote for impeachment on at least one of the three articles.

The last to change was Rep. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), who spent yesterday morning reading the transcripts of the June 23, 1972, conversation between Mr. Nixon

and his chief of staff, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman.

Lott told reporters yesterday afternoon, "I hope he will resign, but if not I have no alternative but to vote for Article I."

"It is obvious that he had knowledge from the early phase of the cover-up," Lott said. "He condoned it, if he didn't approve it."

Lott also said he would reconsider whether to vote for Article II, which charges presidential misuse of executive powers, on grounds that the latest transcripts show that Mr. Nixon approved trying to use the Central Intelligence Agency to interfere with the FBI investigation.

"This is a moment of deep sorrow for me," he added.

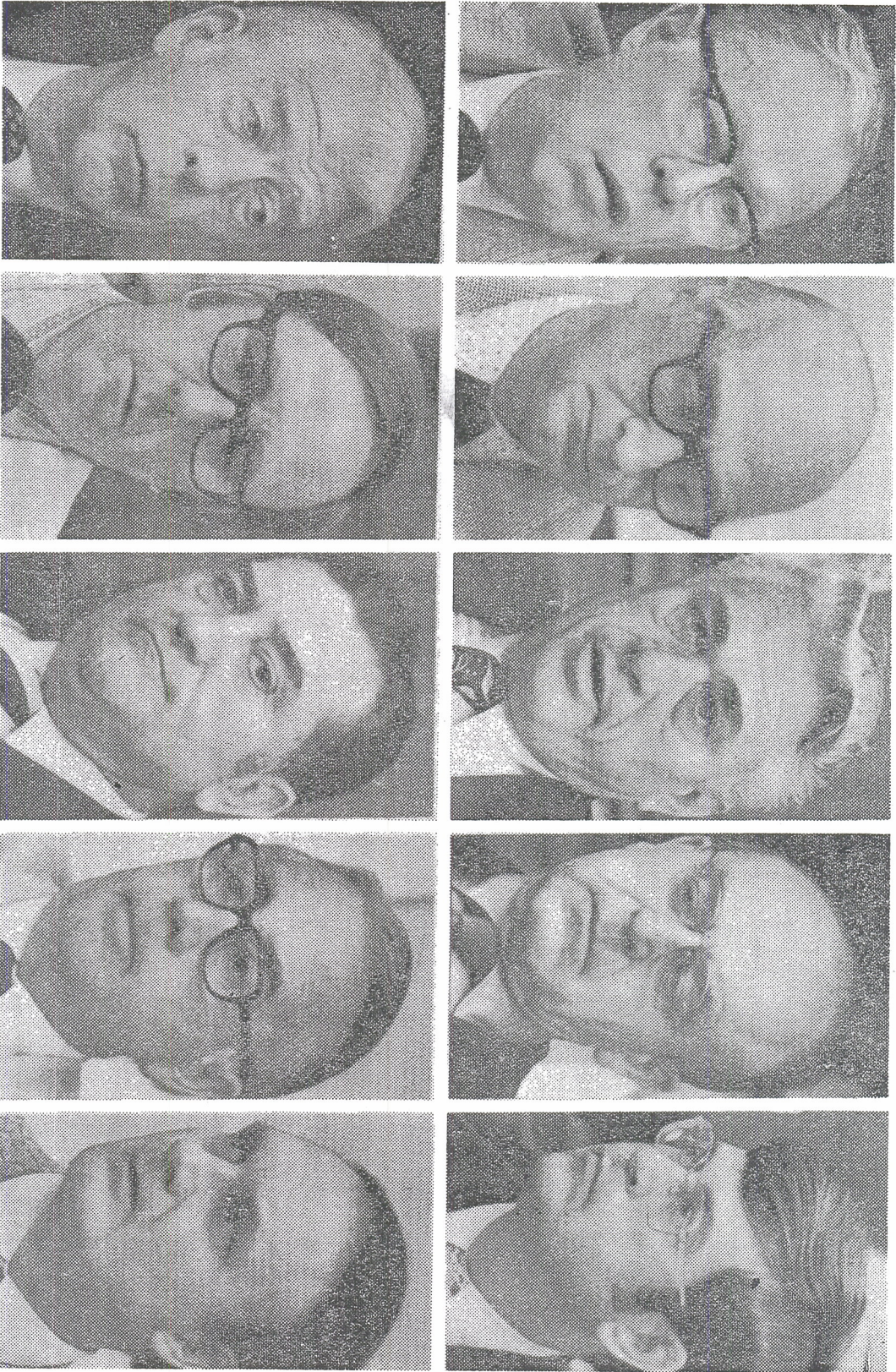
Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.), the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, had stood solidly behind the President until yesterday, when he said he will vote for Article I. He expressed resentment with the evidence that came out after the committee had finished its business. "I feel that I have been deceived," he said.

Rep. Charles W. Sandman, Jr. (R-N.J.), a highly vocal defender of the President during committee debates, said the new evidence furnished by the President left him with no alternative but to vote for impeachment.

"These conversations contain specific, clear and convincing evidence constituting the criminal charge of obstruction of justice, leaving me no recourse but to support impeachment on Article I of the articles of impeachment," Sandman said.

Rep. Delbert L. Latta (R-Ohio) said that if he were in Mr. Nixon's shoes he would resign, and announced that he will vote for the obstruction of justice article.

Rep. Henry P. Smith III (R-N.Y.) came out for impeachment and said it would be in the "best interests" of the country if the President resigned.



Ten Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee who were hard-line defenders of President Nixon during impeachment hearings have changed their minds after hearing the new evidence released by the President Monday.

From left, top row: Edward Hutchinson (Mich.), Joseph J. Maraziti (N.J.), Charles E. Wiggins (Calif.), David W. Dennis (Ind.) and Trent Lott (Miss.). Bottom row: Henry P. Smith (N.Y.), Carlos J. Moorhead (Calif.), Charles W. Sandman Jr. (N.J.), Wiley Mayne (Iowa) and Delbert L. Latta (Ohio).

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