House Judiciary Committee Begins Impeachment Investigation of President Nixon

General Information

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Description

The House Judiciary Committee begins a formal inquiry into the impeachment of President Richard Nixon. The last time such an investigation was launched was in 1867 against President Andrew Johnson.

Keywords


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Transcript

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JOHN CHANCELLOR, anchor:

Good evening from the U.S. Capitol in Washington, where today the House of Representatives began its formal inquiry into the impeachment of President Nixon. There’s been only one similar event in American history. Early in the year 1867, a Committee of the House began an inquiry into the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. He was impeached, but he was acquitted in the Senate trial by one vote. So today, the 9th of May 1974 will go down in the history books.

One year and 11 months after the Republican burglars were caught in the Watergate a couple of miles from here, the impeachment inquiry got under way. It began in the meeting room of the House Judiciary Committee, with opening statements from Committee Chairman Peter Rodino of New Jersey and Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, the ranking Republican. Here’s how it went.

Representative PETER RODNIO (Chairman, Judiciary Committee): The meeting will come to order. Resolved that the Committee and the Judiciary is authorized and directed to investigate fully and completely whether sufficient grounds exist for the House of Representatives to exercise its’ Constitutional power to impeach Richard M. Nixon, President of the United States of America. We understand our high Constitutional responsibility. We will faithfully live up to it.

Representative EDWARD HUTCHINSON (R., Michigan): Today the Committee starts consideration of the most awesome power Constitutionally invested in the House of Representatives. The power of impeachment is one of those great checks and balances written in the Constitution to ameliorate the stark doctrine of the separation of powers. But impeachment of a President is most drastic, for it can bring down an administration of the government. The Constitution itself limits the scope of impeachment of a President to treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.

DOUGLAS KIKER, reporting:
Representative Hutchinson’s contention is the Committee cannot vote to recommend impeachment unless evidence is presented which tends to show that the President committed a criminal act. Many members of the Committee agree with him, and many do not, and in the end, it could be on this point that the final vote for or against impeachment is decided.

One person who does agree with Hutchinson is Presidential counsel James St. Clair, who was present today, and who will be present at this proceeding. After Hutchinson’s statement, a motion was made to go into closed session, but there was an attempt by Committee liberals to keep it open.

One after another, Conyers of Michigan, Rangel of New York, Holtzman of New York and Waldie of California, attempted to argue the point. But Chairman Rodino knew the move was coming and he knew he had the votes to beat it. So the vote was taken, and by 31 to 6 the committee voted that the first session be closed.

The Committee is expected to hold at least 3 more closed sessions during the next 2 weeks, and Chairman Rodino says they will decide later if and when the evidence presented in the closed hearings will be made public.

Then on May 21st, open hearings are scheduled to begin. They’ll be televised, and they are expected to last at least 6 weeks.