House Judiciary Committee's Conclusion on Impeachment (1974)

In June 1972, five men were arrested while attempting to plant wiretaps in the offices of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) at the Watergate hotel in Washington, D.C. President Richard Nixon was facing reelection in November of that year. This event ultimately sparked an investigation into the activities of the Nixon administration. Nixon was reelected by a landslide, but by May 1973 the Senate Watergate committee had begun nationally televised hearings into the incident and a suspected cover-up orchestrated by the White House. The investigation revealed that a taping system installed in the White House had recorded all conversations in the White House offices. In a scandal that seemed to grow more complex every day, Nixon claimed executive privilege to resist turning the tapes over to investigators. However, the Supreme Court ruled against him in July 1974. When investigators finally listened to the tapes, they discovered a gap of eighteen and one-half minutes in the recordings. In late July, the House Judiciary Committee issued three articles of impeachment against Nixon, who would resign in August.

Note: The acronym “CRP” stands for the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Conclusion

After the Committee on the Judiciary had debated whether or not it should recommend Article I to the House of Representatives, 27 of the 38 Members of the Committee found that the evidence before it could only lead to one conclusion; that Richard M. Nixon, using the powers of his high office, engaged, personally and through his subordinates and agents, in a course of conduct or plan designed to delay, impede, and obstruct the investigation of the unlawful entry, on June 17, 1972, into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee; to cover up, conceal and protect those responsible; and to conceal the existence and scope of other unlawful covert activities.

This finding is the only one that can explain the President's involvement in a pattern of undisputed acts that occurred after the break-in and that cannot otherwise be rationally explained.

1. The President's decision on June 20, 1972, not to meet with his Attorney General, his chief of staff, his counsel, his campaign director, and his assistant John Ehrlichman, whom he had put in charge of the investigation--when the subject of their meeting was the Watergate matter.

2. The erasure of that portion of the recording of the President's conversation with Haldeman, on June 20, 1972, which dealt with Watergate--when the President stated that the tapes had been under his "sole and personal control."

3. The President's public denial on June 22, 1972, of the involvement of members of the Committee for the Re-election of the President or of the White House staff in the Watergate burglary, in spite of having discussed Watergate, on or before June 22, 1972,
with Haldeman, Colson, and Mitchell—all persons aware of that involvement.

4. The President's directive to Haldeman on June 23, 1972, to have the CIA request the FBI to curtail its Watergate investigation.

5. The President's refusal, on July 6, 1972, to inquire and inform himself what Patrick Gray, Acting Director of the FBI, meant by his warning that some of the President's aides were "trying to mortally wound" him.

6. The President's discussion with Ehrlichman on July 8, 1972, of clemency for the Watergate burglars, more than two months before the return of any indictments.

7. The President's public statement on August 29, 1972, a statement later shown to be untrue, that an investigation by John Dean "indicates that no one in the White House staff, no one in the Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

8. The President's statement to Dean on September 15, 1972, the day that the Watergate indictments were returned without naming high CRP and White House officials, that Dean had handled his work skillfully, "putting your fingers in the dike every time that leaks have sprung here and there," and that "you just try to button it up as well as you can and hope for the best." . . .

In addition to this evidence, there was before the Committee the following evidence:

1. Beginning immediately after June 17, 1972, the involvement of each of the President's top aides and political associates, Haldeman, Mitchell, Ehrlichman, Colson, Dean, LaRue, Mardian, Magruder, in the Watergate coverup. . . .

Finally, there was before the committee a record of public statements by the President between June 22, 1972, and June 9, 1974, deliberately contrived to deceive the courts, the Department of Justice, the Congress and the American people.

President Nixon's course of conduct following the Watergate break-in, as described in Article I, caused action not only by his subordinates but by the agencies of the United States, including the Department of Justice, the FBI, and the CIA. It required perjury, destruction of evidence, obstruction of justice, all crimes. But, most important, it required deliberate, contrived, and continuing deception of the American people.

President Nixon's actions resulted in manifest injury to the confidence of the nation and great prejudice to the cause of law and justice, and was subversive of constitutional government. His actions were contrary to his trust as President and unmindful of the solemn duties of his high office. It was this serious violation of Richard M. Nixon's constitutional obligations as President, and not the fact that violations of Federal criminal
statutes occurred, that lies at the heart of Article I.

The Committee finds, based upon clear and convincing evidence, that this conduct, detailed in the foregoing pages of this report, constitutes "high crimes and misdemeanors" as that term is used in Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the House of Representatives exercise its constitutional power to impeach Richard M. Nixon.

**Document Analysis**

According to this document, what were Nixon’s most serious crimes? On what grounds did the committee recommend impeachment of the president? Many people believe that Nixon’s actions tarnished not only his own reputation but the office of the president itself. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.