

GOP Allegiance To Nixon Asked, Truth Pledged

Fortunes Are as One, Burch Says

By Lou Cannon
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White House Counselor Dean Burch bluntly told election-shy Republican officials yesterday that they could not afford to desert President Nixon in the wake of Watergate-induced election losses because "our fortunes are as one."

In a move aimed at heading off GOP dissent after a string of special election defeats, Burch asked the Republican National Committee to return "loyalty for loyalty" to the President. He also promised them that Mr. Nixon next week would turn over to the House Judiciary Committee "compelling and persuasive" Watergate evidence from which "the whole story will emerge and the whole truth become known."

The GOP officials politely applauded the promise that the White House would turn over the long-awaited Watergate evidence to the committee. But the national committee sat in complete silence when Burch proclaimed that the President and the party were tied together by bonds of loyalty that could not be separated.

"... I submit to you that Richard Nixon is our President and the leader of our party, and that these two roles are indistinguishable; our

hopes and our goals and our fortunes are as one," Burch said. "His record of accomplishment is our record. . . The President's record is a platform for Republican candidates."

Subsequently, Burch omitted from his speech sentences in his prepared text which spoke of a "a new Republican majority to be built" and which said that "our candidates can run as Nixon Republicans and they can win as Nixon Republicans."

Some Republicans said in interviews after Burch's speech that they do not share the White House definition of party loyalty.

"I think there's a confusion

See GOP, A10, Col. 6

GOP, From A1

there," said New Hampshire National Committeeman Bob Bass. "The party has an obligation to support the President in political matters and as party leader. But Watergate represents an inappropriate extension of party loyalty because the charges involve personal wrongdoing."

"What did Burch mean by the debt of loyalty?" asked Connecticut GOP chairman J. Brian Gaffney. "I think the party has been very loyal to the President. However, I expect my state representatives to run on their own records and that of the state party, not the President's record."

GOP state chairman William McLaughlin of Michigan, where Democrats have won two congressional elections in previously GOP districts, said that candidates in his state al-

ways run as "Michigan Republicans." But McLaughlin said he was encouraged by the pledge that Mr. Nixon would hand over the Watergate evidence.

Burch, meeting briefly with reporters after his speech, declined to specify the form of this evidence or to say whether it would be accompanied by a public statement. Other White House officials indicated that both a televised presidential statement and a Watergate "white paper" were under consideration but said no decision had been reached.

That decision apparently will be made this weekend when Mr. Nixon contemplates his course in the familiar solitude of Camp David.

Burch declined yesterday to be drawn into a discussion of whether Mr. Nixon will turn over the actual tapes requested by the House Judiciary Committee. He asked the Republican officials to "suspend judgment" on the Watergate issue until Mr. Nixon responds early next week to the committee with "a massive body of evidence [that] will supplant charges and allegations and innuendo."

"And out of this factual record the whole story will emerge and the whole truth will become known," Burch said. "That body of evidence will be substantial. It will be relevant. It will be compelling and persuasive. I genuinely believe, beginning early next week, that the end of Watergate will be in sight."

Burch was applauded only lightly during his speech in contrast to the enthusiastic reception given later in the day to Vice President Ford, who urged Republicans not to be dispirited by their losses in the special election. The national committee also cheered party chairman Bush when he defended President Nixon on Watergate and said, "I retain a basic confidence that the President is indeed telling the truth about his lack of involvement in the whole be-damned mess."

Bush, however, frankly confessed that he had been "plagued with doubts" about the President's involvement. He hinted that he would step down, or at least abandon his defense of Mr. Nixon, if he ever became convinced that the President were not telling the truth.

"If I did not have confidence that President Nixon is indeed

telling the truth about his lack of involvement in Watergate, I would not stand here in this philosophical posture," Bush said. "... If I surrender judgment in order to remain loyal I ill-serve this party, I ill-serve the system and indeed I ill-serve the President. As long as I remain chairman I will give you my best judgment."

Bush, who usually has been optimistic about party prospects, did not attempt to minimize the seriousness of the plight facing the Republican Party in the fall elections. He said the party had "an image problem" and that he was "disappointed" by the special elections, where Republicans lost four out of five contests.

But Bush, in a statement echoed by Rep. Bob Michel of Illinois and Ford, said that the GOP would be in a dif-

ferent position in November when incumbent Democrats would have to defend their records as well as attack the President.

"Come fall it will not be enough for every Democrat simply to say 'Watergate' to get elected," Bush said.

In other action, the national committee overwhelmingly opposed federal funding of national political conventions and left in doubt the future of a bipartisan committee that is studying the issue.

L. Keith Bulen, the national committeeman from Indiana,

said that plans for such financing "certainly can be the death knell for the two-party system in this country."

A coalition of Southern and Midwestern party officials joined in supporting the resolution despite warnings that corporations will not continue to finance the national party conventions by buying advertising in convention programs.

Republicans conclude three days of meetings here today with several subcommittee sessions of the "Rule 29 Committee," which is studying party reform.