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Of First Ladies, Impeachment

By Jeannette Smyth

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As her husband's presidency approached a most precarious point, First Lady Pat Nixon, a stalwart of his many campaigns, yesterday shook the hands of nearly 1,000 well-wishers.

Keeping a high profile as the House Judiciary Committee for the second time in history opened presidential impeachment proceedings, Mrs. Nixon appeared at a Republican Capitol Hill Club reception for 500 people in her honor. One of the handful of congressmen who came to greet her was House Minority Leader John Rhodes (R-Ariz.). A staunch Nixon backer until now, he had earlier in the day said the President "should be considering" resignation.

"You didn't think I wouldn't come?" Rhodes bantered with reporters as he stood in line to shake Mrs. Nixon's hand. Asked if he were making a special gesture by appearing there on the day impeachment proceedings began, he said, "No. After all, the Nixons are old friends. This is in honor of Mrs. Nixon. I

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wouldn't not come."

As he went through the line, photographers (who with the rest of the press were cordoned off behind velvet ropes) called for a photograph. Rhodes turned to face the cameras, Mrs. Nixon stuck her arm through his, and said "Now let's look like we're friendly."

They did.

Retiring Rep. Henry P. Smith (R-N.Y.), the third-ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, was also among those who came to greet the wife of his party's leader.

Maryland gubernatorial candidate Louise Gore, Rep. Ancher Nelson (R-Minn.), Sens. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), Carl Curtis (R-Neb.), and John Tower (R-Tex.) were also in the crowd. "It's no special gesture," said Tower. "I happen to like Pat Nixon. I also support the President."

Dr. Rosalie Yonan came

through the line in evening dress, with a "Support the President" banner across her chest. "Come on," Mrs. Nixon called to the photographers. "You gotta get a picture of this."

Presidential counselor Anne Armstrong dropped in briefly after Mrs. Nixon had left. She was asked what reaction there had been in the White House to the unusually harsh comments from Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) and Rhodes in the wake of the publication of the Watergate tape transcripts.

"I haven't talked to enough people today to get any Rhodes reaction," she said, "but I think it would be that they have a right to their opinions. I would say we're right on the brink of solving the matter in the proper way—through Congress.

"I would say," she continued, "that resignation

would be a horrible precedent to set."

Miss Gore said "I have a great deal of respect for Congressman Rhodes and Sen. Scott and I'm interested in what they had to say."

A club spokesman said the event had been planned before it was known that the impeachment inquiry would begin yesterday. "We invite her once a month," he said. "She accepted about two weeks ago." He added "This is probably the largest reception we've had in a while."

Earlier in the day, Mrs. Nixon greeted some 60 members of the women's chapter of the Freedom Foundation at Valley Forge at a White House tea. Then she shook hands with 350 members of the Fairfax County Council of the Arts, who had just completed a Dolley Madison tour of north Virginia.

A representative of the group presented her with a book inscribed: "To a valiant first lady, Mrs. Richard Nixon, in appreciation for helping the Fairfax County Council of the Arts commemorate the heroics of another first lady—Dolley Madison."