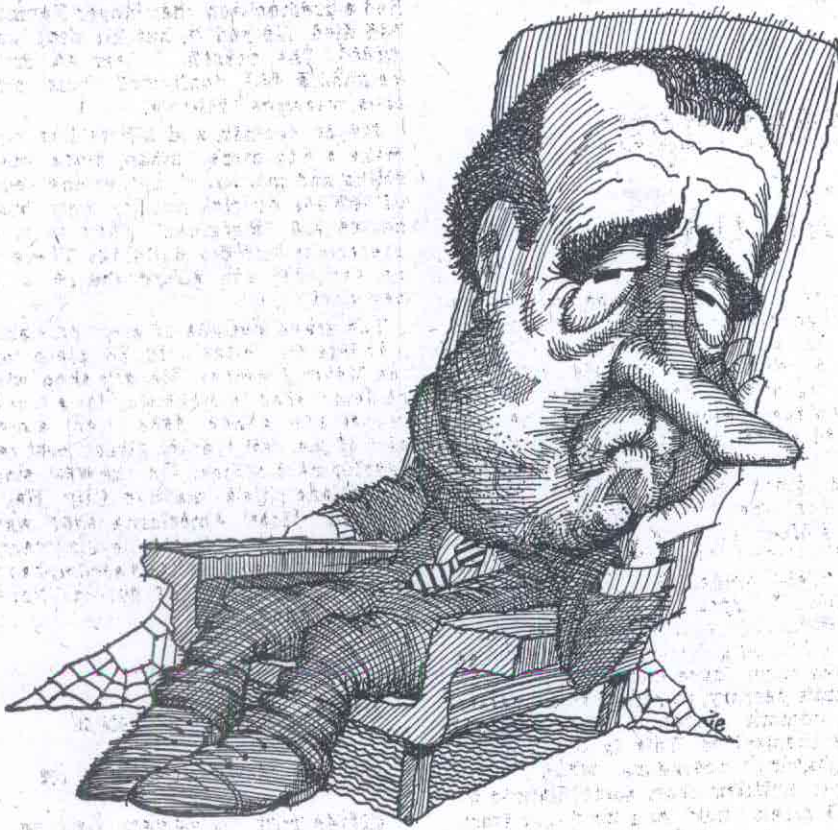


Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

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President Nixon's Mood: Business as



By John Twohy

President Nixon's continued aloofness from the crisis that has carried him to the brink of ruin was brought home this week by his amazing non-reaction to the newspaper reports linking a high administration official to one aspect of the Watergate scandal for the first time.

Mr. Nixon did not summon the official to ask him about it. Nor did he seek to find out the truth for himself. Nor did the development stimulate any Oval Office conversation at all.

Beyond this incident, the President is simply not available for the long serious analysis of Watergate and its explosive dangers that many associates believe is imperative. Although he has seen a few Republican congressmen lately, they have left his office deeply disturbed by Nixonian detachment from the Watergate wreckage.

Thus, while stunned Republican politicians are beginning to talk of the real possibility of impeachment, Mr. Nixon seems unable to wrench himself out of the habit of business as usual. In the judgment of key officials both inside and outside the White House, Mr. Nixon is confiding in nobody. That he did not discuss those headlines with the high administration official who was involved neatly fits that pattern.

Similarly, he has resisted the

Usual

changes being pushed by three top White House officials—Gen. Alexander Haig as “interim” chief of staff, counsel Leonard Garment and press secretary Ron Ziegler. They want frequent and intimate presidential talks with his Cabinet and Republican members of Congress, fresh faces in the White House and the bureaucracy and, most important, exposure to the press.

But in fact, Mr. Nixon’s presidential life has changed very little leading to doubts by both his supporters and his enemies that he means to keep his promises of a new open-door policy. The symbol is Mr. Nixon’s refusal, as we write this, to hold even one press conference—much less regular meetings with reporters which his new top aides feel is imperative.

Mr. Nixon’s most fervent backers are now saying that his refusal to meet the press and do it soon will undermine their claims that the Oval Office has been opened up to bureaucrats and politicians as never before.

In addition, the President still seems so far removed from everyday government operations that even White House aides themselves know little about what the future holds. One obvious example is the case of Gen. Haig as “interim” staff chief.

Haig wants to get out of politics and back to his job as vice chief of staff in the Army within a few weeks, or

even sooner. Yet, one top White House aide sees two years as the proper tenure for Haig. Another believes he will be kept on for two months. In all probability, Mr. Nixon does not know.

Under military discipline, Haig has no choice in the matter and must accept the risk of watching his brilliant Army career dirtied or even destroyed if he is kept in an essentially political job at the White House. Although Haig tells intimates he wants to open up the White House and restore bipartisan civility, he is totally subject to orders of the Commander-In-Chief. Some Republican critics see that as a possibly sinister reason the President chose him.

Finally, Mr. Nixon’s sudden decision to bring John B. Connally into the White House added still more confusion. Top White House aides were led to understand Connally would have no voice in major policy decisions. Yet he is now preparing to draft a new anti-inflation policy in effect repudiating Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz’s disastrous Phase III.

It is very much like earlier years of the Nixon administration: confusion, uncertainty, presidential aloofness. The shock is that so little seems to have changed in the face of a crisis of historic proportions which has far from run its full course.