

# Nixon and the Political Prospects

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 16 — In his book "Six Crises," written several years before he became President, Richard M. Nixon suggested that one of the tests of a great political leader was whether he would "risk all when the stakes were such that he must win or lose all." President Nixon's speech

News  
Analysis

to the nation last night was, in the opinion of many persons here, a considerable political risk. In the speech Mr. Nixon declined to answer specifically the charges made against him in the Congressional Watergate hearings and called on Congress to quit pursuing the matter so he could get on with governing the country.

An alternative tack, suggested by some of the President's aides, would have provided line-by-line answers to the charges. But this course could have posed even greater risk than the limited response because of the possibility that the details could have been refuted.

All summer, as the Watergate hearings ground on, public opinion polls have shown that a majority of people did not believe Mr. Nixon's assertions of innocence in the case.

A Gallup poll taken in early July showed that 34 per cent of those questioned believed the President found out about the bugging and burglary of Democratic headquarters last year after it occurred but tried to cover it up; that 30 per cent believed that while the President did not plan the bugging he knew about it before it took place; that 9 per cent believed he planned the bugging from the beginning.

Only 15 per cent said they believed Mr. Nixon, as he has repeatedly maintained, had no knowledge of the bugging and spoke up as soon as he learned about it.

On top of this, the portion of respondents in a Gallup Poll who believed the President was doing a good job dropped to 31 per cent, a 20-year Presidential low, in early August.

In the face of this, President Nixon went on television and appealed for public support without giving detailed answers to buttress his proclamation of innocence.

Unless the speech and other subsequent statements succeed in turning the matter around, faces the prospect of gov-

## Speech Is Viewed as One of Two Risky Alternatives

erning a body of people who question his basic honesty, if the polls are to be believed.

It is not considered likely that the President will give detailed answers anytime in the foreseeable future to the many charges raised in the hearings. In a statement accompanying his speech, there was an air of finality about the matter.

"I recognize that this statement does not answer many of the questions and contentions raised during the Watergate hearings," he said. "It has not been my intention to attempt any such comprehensive and detailed response.

"Neither do I believe I could enter into an endless course of explaining and rebutting a complex of point-by-point claims and charges arising out of that conflicting testimony which may engage committees and courts for months or years to come, and still be able to carry out my duties as President."

### News Conference Next

Mr. Nixon's spokesmen say that in a few days the President will again submit to questioning in news conferences, after a five-month suspension, and Watergate questions will be permitted. But the Presidential news conference as it has been conducted in the past is not considered a good forum for detailed responses to any thing as complicated as the Watergate matters.

The news conferences, which jump from one subject to another and deal with the full range of government policy usually last only 30 minutes and are held no oftener than twice a month, further, the President can always decline to answer specific questions.

Having ruled out the alternative of a detailed reply, President Nixon's hope for turning public opinion around is based on a belief current in the White House that people are tired of the Watergate disclosures and do not believe there should be further "harassment" of the President.

Even if Congress should agree and reduce or tone down the hearings, the freedom from harassment for Mr. Nixon would be only partial. As the Watergate charges move into the courts, as the President sug-

gested they should, they will still attract widespread public attention, particularly if former Administration officials are indicted or go on trial.

The difficult position that Mr. Nixon occupies on Watergate is pointed up in a statement he made in running for the Presidency in September, 1968. Discussing the nature of the Presidency in a radio address, Mr. Nixon said:

"The President has a duty to decide, but the people have a right to know why. The President has responsibility to tell them—to lay out all the facts and to explain not only what he chose as he did but also what it means for the future. Only through an open, candid dialogue with the people can a President maintain his trust and his leadership."

Now the only tenable position the President and his aides see on Watergate is one of disclosing less than "all the facts." Under his position the President is expected to continue, as he has for the last five months, to "tough it out."

In a sense, the burden now shifts to Congress and its myriad committees to decide whether to continue to pry into alleged Administration scandals or to leave them to the courts. The decision is likely to rest on public opinion that members of Congress, now in recess, are sampling in their home districts.