

Watergate Speech Decision

Why Nixon Was Vague

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When President Nixon sat down

to make his speech on the

Watergate scandal, he was

in a state of mind that

was a staff member's

dream.

The basis of the speech

was to be a simple, direct

statement of the facts.

It was to be a statement

of the facts, not a

defense of the President.

At first, the staff

thought it would be

possible to do

something detailed and

fairly definitive, but

then it became clear

that every answer he

gave would simply

repeat Mr. Nixon's strategy

of avoiding the point by

changing the subject over

and over.

At Camp David, he decided

that it would not serve his

purpose to make publicly

the specific details of the

Watergate scandal that has

shaken his presidency.

Why did Mr. Nixon back

away from the strategy of a

detailed, point-by-point

response? Interviews with

several of the President's

advisers brought these

explanations.

"At first we thought it

might be possible to do

something detailed and

fairly definitive, but then

it became clear that every

answer he gave would simply

repeat the questions in

the press and it would

keep going on and on."

It became a question

of what was the appropriate

level of detail for the Pres-

ident of the United States to

adopt—a question of the

appropriateness of getting

into the pit.

"He was worried that

a detailed response would

lead to the matter being

worked out in front of

witnesses who would

then be called back at the

hearings to be asked to

respond.

A key factor in the Pres-

ident's decision to offer a

broad brush response to the

Watergate accusations was

his conclusion that the pub-

lic press would not be

Watergate for the next

day.

The White House con-

sidered this a very real

subject, the adviser

said. "The first question

was, 'One sentence from

House man said.

Another said, 'The

was that there was

taking place. But there

shift to reduce the

public hearings with

rate."

In essence, the Nixon

were saying, Mr. Nixon

needed the public to be

explained because he

needed he got off the

without one.