

# Quitting Called 'An Easy Copout'

3/16/74  
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CHICAGO, March 15 —

President Nixon today proclaimed anew his innocence of Watergate wrongdoing and emphasized his determination not to resign.

"I will not be a party to the destruction of the presidency of the United States," he declared.

"If the President resigned when he was not guilty of charges, then every President in the future could be forced out of office by simply leveling some charges and getting the media to carry them and getting a few congressmen and senators who were on the other side to exploit them," Mr. Nixon said.

"Resignation is an easy copout," he said.

If the time comes when a President makes decisions on public opinion polls rather than what is right or wrong "we will have a very weak President," he said.

In an hour-long question-and-answer session before more than 2,000 persons at the Executives' Club of Chicago luncheon the President drew frequent applause as he fielded a wide range of questions from the audience on foreign and domestic issues, including Watergate.

Outside the Conrad Hilton Hotel, where the President spoke, there were more than a thousand demonstrators, pro-Nixon and anti-Nixon. Some chanted for the President and carried signs saying "God Loves Nixon." A number of signs on the other side called for his impeachment and demanded he pay more in taxes.

Contrary to expectations, the President did not clear up a contradiction between his March 6 press conference, when he said he first learned on March 21, 1973, that hush money was being paid Watergate defendants, and an Aug. 15 statement that said he was only told that money was being paid for attorneys' fees and family support.

Aides had suggested the

President would clear up the matter today, but he did not address it directly.

"Correcting what may have been a misapprehension when I spoke to the press on March 6 in Washington, it was alleged that the payments that had been made to defendants were made for the purpose of keeping them still," he said.

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former presidential aides H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman "have all denied that that was the case and they certainly should be allowed the right in court to establish

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their innocence or guilt without our concluding that that was the case," the President said.

Asked if he would testify in court in behalf of his accused former aides, the President said he would not do so. It would be "most unfortunate" for a President to testify in court, he said, adding that he already has made available all relevant information.

When a state senator pre-faced a question by saying that in his Republican district "you are thought of belovedly by thousands of people, and I think you need to hear that," the President interrupted to say, "Perhaps you should tell your United States senator that."

The sally, directed against Republican Sen. Charles Percy, a frequent Nixon critic and aspirant to the presidency, drew applause and laughter.

Later, the President returned to the subject, saying he did not want his remark misunderstood. Percy has "great ability" and has a right to be a presidential candidate, he said.

The President said he wanted the 1976 Republican candidate to be able to run on a strong platform based on peace abroad and progress at home.

"If we can accomplish some of the goals I have laid out

in the State of the Union message" the GOP candidate "will have a good chance to win," Mr. Nixon said.

In answer to a question on the oil embargo, Mr. Nixon warned the Arab countries that they should not attempt to pressure this country with the embargo weapon.

While suggesting that the embargo probably will be lifted this weekend, he made clear his dislike of a conditional lifting based on what the Arabs might regard as proper conduct by the United States in the Middle East.

The United States "is not going to be pressured by our friends in the Mideast or others who might be our opponents to doing something before we are able to do it," he said.

If there are any implications of pressure in the lifting of the embargo "it would have a counter effect on our efforts to go forward on the peace front, because it would simply slow down our very real and earnest efforts to get the disengagement on the Syrian front and also to move toward a permanent settlement."

The President declared that the United States already has "broken the back" of the energy crisis, but "nagging" problems will continue.

The dire predictions of recession and high unemploy-

ment made last fall have not proved correct, he said, adding that there would be no recession this year and that inflation will be moderated.

In his comments on Watergate charges, the President specifically denied that he had prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in, that he was informed of the cover-up as early as Sept. 15, 1972, that he was informed on March 13, 1973, that a blackmail attempt was being made by the Watergate defendants on the White House, that he authorized clemency or a promise of clemency for the defendants and that he ordered the burglarizing of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

"All those charges have been made," the President said. "Many of the Americans, perhaps a majority, of them, believe them. They are all totally false and the investigations will prove it."

The President promised to cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee in its impeachment inquiry, and said he wanted a "prompt and just conclusion."

However, as he has in the past, to the committee's distress, he said he would cooperate "consistent with my responsibility to defend the office of the Presidency."

Every President has recognized the necessity of protecting the confidentiality of presidential conversations, Mr. Nixon said.

If confidentiality is not protected, he added, the President "will be surrounded by a group of eunuchs insofar as their advice is concerned."

"I will do nothing to weaken the office of the presidency," he said, "because we need a strong President at this time rather than a weak one."

He also rejected a suggestion of a popular referendum to unseat a President who loses confidence.

The Founding Fathers were right in establishing a system where there is "stability in the Chief Executive," he said. They did not want the kind of instability that would result from a system where a President constantly faced the threat of a vote of no confidence, he added.

Mr. Nixon vigorously defended his administration's record in handling the energy crisis.

It has been dealt with "very effectively by this administration," he asserted, noting that some critics predicted 10 per cent unemployment and recession by today. Yet, he said, unemployment is at 5.2 per cent of the labor force.

He predicted that "we will be getting some more oil from the Mideast" and that gasoline lines will be shortened.