

Nixon Under Fire on Hill

Byrd: 'Distorts Truth'

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Senate Democratic Whip Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) blasted President Nixon yesterday for an "unjustified vicious attack on Congress" on energy matters and for "deliberately distorting the truth" on the Watergate issue.

"The President is deliberately distorting the truth when he says that he is cooperating with the courts and the special prosecutor" and with the House Judiciary Committee, Byrd told reporters.

Referring to an accusation made by President Nixon at his Tuesday news conference that Congress is dragging its feet on energy legislation, Byrd said, "The President is obviously in a spot and he is trying to shift attention" away from his own failings.

President Nixon's criticism of Congress on the energy issue was also assailed yesterday by both House Democratic leaders.

"We passed one bill and he vetoed it," said House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.).

"President Nixon engaged in one of his favorite diversions last night—sniping at Congress from the cover of a friendly audience," said House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.). "The only energy action we have is the result of a law passed by Congress last year over the President's objections. And the reason we have no new law is that the President vetoed it just a few days ago. He took sides with the oil companies who fought the oil price rollback."

See BYRD, A8, Col. 4

Byrd Hits Nixon for Attacking Hill

BYRD, From A1

The remarks directed against Mr. Nixon by Byrd, an astute, powerful and cautious man, are among the harshest aimed at Mr. Nixon by a democratic leader of Congress.

For Byrd, they represent a step into the center of the battle between Congress and the President over energy policy and the Watergate issue.

Byrd strongly backed both Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski and the House Judiciary Committee in their demands for materials which the White House has declined to furnish, and repeated several times that it is a "distortion" for the President to claim he is cooperating fully. He cited a letter from Jaworski to the Senate Judiciary Committee complaining that the White House is withholding data sought by Jaworski, and he described the House Judiciary impeachment probe as "a legitimate constitutional inquiry" to which Mr. Nixon isn't giving real cooperation.

Byrd made clear that he has adopted the broad view of the impeachment power. He said it is permissible not only when there is a serious crime committed by the President, but also when there is serious misconduct in office.

He said the White House argument that the President can be impeached only for a specific felonious act is "a gross exaggeration and gross distortion."

The sharpness of Byrd's remarks reflect a frustration on the part of Democratic leaders that the President, through press conferences and special reports to the public, has been able to command prime television time to plead his case on impeachment and to attack Congress — while Congress has no corresponding forum.