

White House Won't Repeat Nixon Pledge on Back Taxes

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The White House yesterday refused to repeat President Nixon's earlier pledge to pay any back taxes that may be recommended by a congressional committee that is investigating his returns for the years 1969 through 1972.

The refusal suggested that the President may be moving toward a tougher stance in his dealings with Congress.

The impression was reinforced when deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren criticized the Democratic Congress on the tax issue and GOP leaders, following a two-hour meeting with the President, joined in a general attack on Congress.

The Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation will receive a staff report today on Mr. Nixon's possible tax liabilities. When Warren was asked to comment on the committee's work and on the President's reaction to it, he replied bluntly: "We'll address this all at one time."

When asked the specific question of whether the President would abide by his earlier promise to accept the tax committee's findings, Warren ducked the question.

He was reminded that as recently as last week he had said the President stood by the promise, but he declined to comment except to say that the matter would be discussed all at one time.

Warren also took issue with Democrats on Capitol Hill who have predicted that the House has the votes to impeach the President.

It is "unusual" for members to begin counting the votes against the President even before the material supplied to the House Judiciary Committee has been assessed, Warren said.

A few moments earlier from the same podium House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) said that "until the evidence is in, I don't think it would be proper for anyone else to ask anyone how he is going to vote, and I won't do that."

Rhodes and Senate Minority Whip Robert P. Griffin (R-Mich.) assailed Democrats for doing little or nothing to act on the President's legislative program.

"I think the record of the Democratic Congress with respect to energy is the biggest scandal of all," Griffin said. Rhodes said there was "absolutely no motion" toward enactment of the President's program.

Congress has acted on only one — the Alaska pipeline act — of a score of Nixon proposals on energy, Rhodes said. Griffin raised the question of whether the Democrats "want to do something about the energy shortage" or "just want an issue in the November election."

When Griffin was asked whether he thought a presidential visit to Michigan might help Republican nominee James Sparling win a House seat in the April 16 special election, the senator said that "in some areas of that district it would help very much. In other areas, I suppose it wouldn't. It is a very close question, politically speaking."

Warren said Sparling had invited the President to the district but that no decision has yet been made. Other sources reported that the President has tentatively agreed to speak in the district, probably next Wednesday.

Vice President Ford, at a lunch with reporters, said he thought "the situation is such that the President should go" to Saginaw, and he had so recommended to White House political aide Dean Burch and Republican National Chairman George Bush yesterday.

"I have to think that when the chips are down, it will help the candidate," Ford said.

He also might go into the district a couple of days after a presidential visit, Ford said.

Ford acknowledged that the President's appearance could convert the congressional election into a referendum on Mr. Nixon, but "if he loses, that doesn't mean he ought to resign."

The Vice President said that "in retrospect, maybe he (Mr. Nixon) should have" gone into the four earlier special congressional elections this year, three of which were lost by the Republicans in districts long held by the GOP. "Nobody asked him," Ford said.

When Rhodes was asked to comment on the prediction of Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) that Democrats will win more than 300 House seats in November, the Arizonian said he didn't agree. He cautioned that it is "risky business to try to predict any election seven months in advance."