

# Nixon's 1952 Checkers Speech Big Hit at Movies

7/13/73

By Ronald Taylor

Washington Post Staff writer

Laughter, born in chuckles in three or four spots in the small movie theater, rolled at the screen in the Biograph on Wednesday night even before the speech started. Sen. Richard M. Nixon's 1952 television address to the nation, his side of the furor over an \$18,000 expense fund during the presidential campaign, is part of the current bill at the Biograph.

The film, a little over 30 minutes long, is shown twice a night, right after "Amos 'n' Andy" and just before "The Mickey Mouse Club". Nearly all of the 280 seats were taken. Many of the viewers stressed that the speech wasn't the only reason they came to see the show although some of the mostly young audience said they'd heard about the speech and wanted to see it first-hand. "I never understood what the Checkers speech was really about and since the Watergate I've been hearing lots of references to it," one woman said. "But no one ever says what really happened."

The speech is known as the Checkers speech because of the reference Nixon made to a dog by that name. The cocker spaniel was a gift from a Texas man to Mr. Nixon after his successful bid for the vice presidential nomination. He pledged during the speech to keep the dog.

Mr. Nixon was a senator then, the GOP vice presidential nominee in what a wire service dispatch labeled a "fight for his political life" in the wake of disclosures of an \$18,000 expense fund and campaign fund abuse allegations. He was Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's running mate and, following the disclosures, there was speculation he would be dropped from the ticket. It was agreed that the future of the Nixon candidacy would be decided by public response to the address. The response was overwhelming-

ly favorably and Nixon stayed on the ticket. The laughter died for a second at the opening lines of the speech, but picked up again when Mr. Nixon described himself as a "man whose honesty and integrity have been questioned." And again a few sentences later when he said, "... and I want to make this particularly clear..." And again at the phrase, "... I have not engaged in any legal practice." (He was referring to the fact that he stopped practicing law after his election to Congress.) And it rose to greater heights when he said, "I know that this is not the last of the smears against me." "Anybody who enters politics leaves himself open to stuff like that," Mike Resch, who was running the theater last night, said. He explained that the film is shown about three times a year at the Biograph and "once in a while" at the Circle Theater a few blocks away on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The last time the film was shown, he said, the run began April 28, the night of the first Nixon address on the Watergate scandal. "We had a couple of calls that night commending us on our selection," Resch said.