

President Impresses Meeting

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A buoyant, combative President Nixon yesterday gave Republican congressmen the impression that he is determined to answer publicly the many allegations of scandal against his administration.

"Almost everyone said, 'My God, I wish 10 reporters had been there,'" said Rep. Dan Kuykendall of Tennessee after Mr. Nixon's meeting with 78 House GOP members. "The candor, the obvious straight-forward honesty of his answers—he answered in a way that made it obvious you could check up on him very quickly."

The congressmen broke into applause during the breakfast meeting in the White House when Mr. Nixon said emotionally:

"I'm not going to walk away from my job."

Even some of Mr. Nixon's strongest critics within the party were impressed by his determination to stay in office and fight back against the charges that have engulfed his administration.

"I was impressed by his state of physical and emotional health," said Rep. Paul N. McCloskey of California, who briefly challenged Mr. Nixon for the GOP presidential nomination last year. "He looked to me like he relished the combat he was in."

But McCloskey added that there was "an air of unreality" about the meeting because the President was "adopting the posture that the opposition to him is politically and partisanly motivated rather than motivated by a search for truth."

McCloskey said also that Mr. Nixon was not asked hard questions at the meeting and that it was unclear that he was "really going to make a clean breast of things."

However, many of the Republican congressmen who attended the session praised the President for his candor. Rep. Margaret Heckler of Massachusetts said she had never seen Mr. Nixon so "forthright and candid."

"Rep. H. John Heinz III of Pennsylvania said that if the approach taken yesterday 'really represents a change in his leadership

See DELEGATION, A12, Col. 6

DELEGATION, From A1

style . . . it may well be that the public will begin to take him back into its confidence."

"This meeting was the best damned thing he's done in a long time," said Rep. William Ketchum of California, a freshman who has often been critical of Mr. Nixon's responses on Watergate.

But this newfound enthusiasm for Mr. Nixon from GOP congressmen who had been growing increasingly

skeptical was coupled with a realization that the President's present actions were only what Rep. Joseph McDade of Pennsylvania called "the first step" in restoring presidential credibility.

"It was a rather mixed performance in terms of specifics, but if he follows through and makes the facts public, that's progress," McDade said.

Rep. Leslie Arends of Illinois, the Minority Whip, called Mr. Nixon's performance "very straightforward," but said he didn't know whether public appearances of the President would "put an end" to credibility problems for everyone.

"I think a lot of those people who are McGovern-inspired . . . we can't shut up," Arends said. "But the average American will be satisfied."

The overwhelming response from the Republicans who saw Mr. Nixon yesterday seemed to be a continued willingness to give him the benefit of the doubt, coupled with a realization that Mr. Nixon's credibility problems are very deep-seated.

"You just have to struggle back up hill, and that's what he apparently intends to do," said Rep. Barber Conable of New York. "He'll have to go far beyond what a President normally has to do to reassure people. It'll take a series of demonstrations of openness . . . He can't think that this week will straighten it all out."

Mr. Nixon followed up his partisan meeting with a dinner at the White House for 50 to 60 moderate to conservative Democratic congressmen. He also held a third consecutive pre-dinner meeting at which drinks were served to Republican senators, who then had an opportunity to ask questions of the President.

By today, Mr. Nixon will have met with all 234 Republican members of the House and Senate in his extensive effort to convince Congress of his innocence.

Some Democrats thought that Mr. Nixon's meetings were a crude attempt to influence congressmen who would have to sit in judgment of him in impeachment proceedings.