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Candidates Find Support Among Public—Reaction of Republicans Mixed

By JOHN DARNTON

Democratic politicians in the metropolitan area—especially those running for offices in tomorrow's primary—reacted yesterday to President Ford's decision to pardon former President Nixon with expressions of outrage and indignation.

In statements sprinkled with words like "principle" and "justice," they universally condemned the action, and those who ventured out on the streets for some 11th-hour handshaking found considerable support for this point of view from the public.

"It's a sad sign of weakness," said Ramsey Clark, the former United States Attorney General who is running in the Democratic primary for United States Senate. "Equal justice under the law is the foundation on which the country's system is built."

Pedestrians Query Candidates

As he spoke, his lanky frame was temporarily stalled on Vanderbilt Avenue, amid a crunch of thousands who turned out for the Portobello antique fair. More than a dozen persons approached him for his view on the matter—no one asked him any other question—and each time, his answer met with approval.

Two blocks north, Abraham Hirschfeld, one of Mr. Clark's opponents, was jubilantly embracing and autographing leaflets with a pen plucked from his belted, safari-styled suit, when Dorothy Newman, a passer-by, froze him with a stare.

"Tell me what you think about what Ford did," she demanded.

"Lady, it's a disgrace, a sham," he said, for the umpteenth time in an hour, "that something like this could happen in America."

"Now I'll shake your hand," she replied.

The two contenders for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, who have been disagreeing on a lot of things lately, spoke almost in chorus in their condemnation of President Ford's action.

"No one wants to see former President Nixon persecuted," said Howard J. Samuels, "but by pre-empting the judicial process now, Mr. Ford has created two standards of justice, one for the prominent and

powerful and one for the rest of society."

Loss of Truth Feared

Representative Hugh L. Carey, Mr. Samuels' opponent, issued a statement terming the Mr. Ford's move "a serious misjudgment" that "means the American people may never learn the full truth about the most serious abuse of power in our history."

He went a bit further a few hours later, when, debating Mr. Samuels over WNEW-TV, he said: "We're not going to have law and order if a man who was obviously part of a conspiracy at the highest level of government goes scot free."

Representative Elizabeth Holtzman, the Brooklyn Democrat who served on the House Judiciary Committee, which voted a bill of impeachment against Mr. Nixon, called the move "a gross misuse" of President Ford's power.

"I am deeply disturbed to find a continuation in the Ford Administration of what we saw under President Nixon—namely, the perversion of the criminal justice system to shield those in power from accountability under our law," she said.

Others who criticized the President included: Bronx Borough President Robert Abrams and Rockland County District Attorney Robert R. Meehan, both candidates for the nomination for State Attorney General; Allard K. Lowenstein, the candidate in the 5th Congressional District, and Manhattan District Attorney Richard H. Kuh, who is facing a primary to retain his office.

Javits Reaction Mixed

Reaction among Republicans when forthcoming, was mixed. Senator Jacob K. Javits, who had been criticized for not speaking out forcefully on the Watergate scandal when Mr. Nixon was in office, said he had hoped President Ford "would permit the courts to work out the situation . . . and that he would not have acted so quickly."

"But the pardoning power is between the President and his conscience," Mr. Javits added. "Hence, there is nothing further to be said or done about it, except to press forward in the cases and with the reforms arising out of the tragedy of Watergate."

Governor Wilson, asked for his reaction at a speech at the Buffalo Launch Club in Western New York, said:

"This is the first I've heard of it. I haven't had the opportunity to read the papers or watch television coverage yet. The President is the President, and I'm a great believer in people minding their own business. It is the responsibility of the President to deal with matters of this kind, not the Governor of New York."