

Stennis Will Live, Nixon Says

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. John C. Stennis was visited today by President Nixon as improvement was reported in the condition of the 71-year-old Mississippi Democrat but chances he would recover from gunshot wounds continued "grave."

But Nixon, after a 10-minute visit with Stennis in Walter Reed Army Medical Center, told newsmen: "I think he's going to make it."

"He has enormous problems," Nixon said of Stennis, "but he's in excellent shape." Nixon said he based his judgment on Stennis' handshake.

"HE'S always had a grip of steel," Nixon said. "I had thought that after what he suffered it might be limp. But his handshake came on as strong as it ever was."

A hospital spokesman said the senator, who underwent 45 minutes of exploratory surgery Tuesday, rested well during the night and was "awake, alert, and conversant" today.

The spokesman, Maj. Frank Garland, said at a 7 a.m. briefing that the senator's surgeons "consider his condition to have stabilized since yesterday's surgery."

Nixon said he told Stennis "the whole country is praying for him."

"HE'S DONE SO much to help the country," the President said. "Now the country's going to help him."

"One of the most important factors in recovery is to know you are needed — adn Sen. Stennis knows that . . . he's got the will to live in spades."

Nixon also said there may be many people who have disagreed with Stennis—"those who want to weaken the national defense—but there's no one who dislikes him."

The President said he was told by doctors that Stennis has made "a remarkable comeback since yesterday."

Stennis was shot twice in a holdup

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Stennis Still in Danger

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near his Washington home on Jan. 30.

Today's hospital statement said:

"Sen. Stennis rested well last night. He was able to sleep a total of five hours. He is now awake, alert and conversant.

"His fever has lowered somewhat from last evening. The vital signs are good. Surgeons consider his condition to have stabilized since yesterday's surgery.

"However, he is still listed as very serious and the prognosis is still grave."

STENNIS, CHAIRMAN of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was shot in the stomach and thigh. The bullet that hit him in the stomach penetrated his pancreas and colon.

Stennis underwent 6½ hours of surgery after the shooting. However, the bullet which entered his stomach and lodged in his right flank was not removed.

Stennis' prognosis had been described as "guarded" ever since the attack, but he was reported showing improvement until early Tuesday.

The exploratory operation was carried out after surgeons "became concerned about a change in the condition of his small intestine," the spokesman said.

DOCTORS HAD suspected a blockage in Stennis' small intestine, the

spokesman said. The surgery revealed no blockage, he said, but congestion and inflammation of the intestine was found.

While the surgical team was satisfied with the way Stennis tolerated the surgery, the spokesman said, the operation "resulted in the worsening of his condition."

Police said they have no new substantive leads in the search for Stennis' attackers, although between 600 and 700 persons have been questioned. Police indicated they now suspect three male teen-agers in the shooting, instead of two as originally announced.

Meanwhile, Senate Republicans condemned what they called the "senseless, vicious attack" on Stennis. They approved a resolution at a conference Tuesday that said Stennis "has always exemplified the highest traditions of this body . . . he has become universally esteemed."

REWARDS TOTALING nearly \$20,000 have been announced for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the assailants. Among them is a \$2,500 reward voted by the Jackson, Miss., City Council Tuesday.

"I wish it were more," Mayor Russell Davis said, noting the amount was the maximum allowable under the law. "We might see other cities joining in, and we might see this reward reach a point where someone will talk . . ."