

NYT
1-21-72



Associated Press

JURISTS ATTEND: From front: Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and Associate Supreme Court Justices William O. Douglas, William J. Brennan Jr., Potter Stewart, Byron R. White, Thurgood Marshall, Harry A. Blackmun, Lewis F. Powell Jr., William H. Rehnquist.

A Message in Traditional Mold

By MAX FRANKEL

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20—The annual State of the Union Message is not normally more than an upbeat rendering of the state of the President—except in election years, when it also becomes an index of the President's sense of the mood of the voters. President Nixon has honored the tradition on both counts. Contending that there is a "national interest" that transcends all partisan considerations, Mr. Nixon was faithful also to the tradition that a President campaigns best by showing himself to be too busy for politics. That is all part of the game, as it is understood and played by both parties, presumably because the voters like it that way.

But the President has announced for re-election, and today's reports to Congress were the first full expression of the record and arguments he must carry into the campaign. Gone were the bloated promises of last year's "new American revolution." Gone also were the belligerent attacks on Congress and demonstrators of the year before. Mr. Nixon reverted today to his inaugural theme of "forward together" and to the moderate generalities that helped him to seize the center on most issues in 1968.

His bid for the middle ground was evident at the very beginning of his television and written reports, as he emphasized a special pride in foreign policy moves. He stressed the huge withdrawal from South Vietnam while insisting that nothing vital would be yielded

Nixon Says 'National Interest' Rules Out a Partisan Role

to North Vietnam. He cited progress toward arms control with the Russians while proposing new military spending to guard against weakness. And he pointed hopefully to his journeys to Peking and Moscow while cautioning that no major breakthroughs are likely there.

Mr. Nixon obviously recognized uneasiness in the country on each of these counts—among Republicans as well as Democrats — but he served notice that he intended to press the doves and hawks to the outer edges of the political limb.

On domestic issues, the President showed himself to be a little more defensive, but by no means unprepared to address the dominant concerns of the electorate.

Notes Domestic Peace

He admitted underestimating the strength of inflationary pressures, but he blamed his predecessor for economic mismanagement and sought credit for finally applying the distasteful remedy of controls. He betrayed a sense of vulnerability for the high rate of unemployment, but insisted that his gradual remedies would prove more lasting than those of the Democrats.

He claimed credit for the relative calm in the cities and on the campuses, without again directly blaming the Democrats for the violence. He embraced as his own achievements the work of Congress on such

things as lowering the voting age and increasing food programs. And he chided Congress for taking too long in the enactment of his principal domestic reforms, for welfare, for revenue sharing, for added health benefits and for reorganization of the Federal Government.

Yet all of this was offered as the thought of a leader who stands above the battle, with hardly any intimation of the conflicts and debates that surround these issues, in both parties.

Moreover, Mr. Nixon reached out to meet the anxieties of large voter groups even where he did not yet know what he proposed to do about them. High on this list of subjects under active consideration, he said, are Federal relief from real estate taxes, new methods of financing the public schools, new ways of better training the young and the unskilled for vocations, new ways of cutting through red tape in social programs and generally providing more jobs by making American industry more competitive in the world.

The President will get plenty of argument from his still unchosen opponent about the state of the cities and the campuses and the crime rate everywhere, as well as the war and the economy. But he has tried to anticipate every vulnerability and for six months more he will stand alone at center stage.

Long known for his skill in exploiting dissatisfactions against incumbents, Mr. Nixon began today the year-long effort to play to the cheerful side of the country, leaving his critics to aim at only a very fast-moving target.