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Angry Albert and Mansfield losing patience with Nixon

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WASHINGTON—Speaker Carl Albert and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, both the mildest of men, are losing their patience with President Nixon. With uncharacteristic anger, they are rallying members to stop the President's encroachment on congressional authority.

The Speaker, sounding more like a gamecock than the lame pullet his critics claim,

Jack Anderson

is scathing in his criticism of Nixon. "As a lame-duck President, he seems to feel he doesn't need to worry what he does," Albert told us caustically.

The milder Mansfield, whose gentle manners are but the moss on a character of granite, is more restrained in his language but equally firm in his resolve. He talked to us of the "unwarranted powers" and "flagrant abuses" of the President. But Mansfield suggested quietly that Congress, itself, was mostly to blame for "abdication of its power to the Presidency in the nuclear age."

Albert taking steps

Albert is preparing to invite the nation's top constitutional lawyers from leading universities and law firms to advise Congress what steps can be taken to restore its authority. He is seeking legislation which would restrict the President's power to wage undeclared wars and impound funds but which would stand up in the Supreme Court. "I have thought about this more than anything else," he told us.

Mansfield has urged his colleagues in the Senate Democratic caucus to stand up to the President. The lean and leathery man from Montana never speaks without long and deep thought, never rushes into any action. His strong stand inside the caucus, therefore, is evidence of his anger.

Mansfield is dubious

He is dubious, however, about the ability of Congress to stand up to the President. "It is almost impossible to reverse the process which Congress has acceded to and for

which Congress must take the blame," he told us. "All I can do is to say the words. In caucus, there is general agreement. The problem is to get the senators to implement the words."

The attitude of these two lions of Capitol Hill is all the more surprising and significant because the White House had counted on them to help heal the rift with Congress. Both leaders have been courted by the President, who invites them over to the White House once in a while for a private tete-a-tete.

"Now and then he has breakfast with me," acknowledged the Speaker. "He does most of the talking. All presidents do."

Albert sounds off

The former Rhodes scholar has issued his declaration of independence from the Nixon Administration formally on a TV show, which he taped with Rep. Lester Wolff, D-N.Y. From an audio tape of the broadcast, which both men had hoped to keep under wraps until later, we can offer an additional rare glimpse of the Speaker sounding off.

"I think we are heading for a constitutional crisis" between the White House and Congress, Albert said. "I think we are heading for a real crisis . . . The spirit of the Constitution has certainly been violated by the administration."

He spoke of such basic issues as housing, education, highways, clean water and health. "With President Nixon in the White House and his attitude toward these things, the Lord only knows what will happen to these programs," Albert said. "The trouble is that he spends the money where he wants to spend it and overspends where he wants to spend it and impounds money that we think is necessary."

The main goal of the House this year, he said, will be "to try to re-establish the position of the House and the Senate in the government, because I think every other problem hinges on how effectively we are able to do that job."

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Albert spoke acidly about the President's refusal to let members of his White House staff testify. Everyone knows, he said, where the

real power lies. White House adviser Henry Kissinger, Albert asserted, is "20 times" better known than Secretary of State William Rogers.

"What good does it do if we don't get the information from those who really have the basic information, the basic contact with the President and the basic authority?" he asked.

To compel the Nixon men to testify, Albert said, "A lot of thought is being given to making it a violation of the law for individuals not to appear on a congressional summons."

The Speaker, who has gotten more than his share of grapes from the press, also attacked the President's anti-press policies. Congressman Wolff, a former broadcaster, told of "veiled threats" to radio-TV stations if they don't "go along with the executive line."

Albert cut him off in mid-sentence. "Of course, that's dictatorship!" he snapped. "The renewal of licenses for a radio or TV station just for political reasons would come close to being a crime."

Added the Speaker: "I understand that certain people at the White House have been instructed not to say anything about certain areas of the operation of government now. This, it seems to me, is unfair, not only to the press but to the American people . . . We couldn't be a democracy if we didn't have freedom of the press."

Footnote: In defense of the President, Senate Republican Leader Hugh Scott told us: "Congress is full of machismo, but Congress can't win a showdown with the President." He said President Nixon had tried to cooperate with Congress, had invoked executive privilege only three times in the past four years, and would require his cabinet officers to testify before Congress if given "reasonable and seasonable notice."