

Nixon to 1976 Candidates: Don't Be Eager Too Soon

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31 — Richard Nixon, who has been running for office for 26 years with — as he said — “mixed results,” offered some advice today to candidates for the Presidency in 1976: Don't be too eager.

A Presidential candidate “is out of his mind,” President Nixon said, if he starts “running for the nomination before the elections of 1974 are concluded.” [Question 7, Page 20.]

Mr. Nixon was responding to a question, at his first news conference in 112 days, about reports that he had said John B. Connally, his former Secretary of the Treasury, would make an excellent Republican Presidential candidate in 1976.

The President reiterated his belief that Mr. Connally, a Democrat and former Governor

of Texas, “could handle any job” in the country or the world.

But Mr. Nixon added that he, in turn, would be out of his mind if he were to endorse anybody at this time when “a number of people” have indicated an interest in the Presidency. Including in that number Vice President Agnew and “several Governors,” Mr. Nixon said he would not make his choice “until after they have been through a few primaries.”

The commentary on Presidential candidates four years hence served as a brief interlude in the increasingly raucous debate over the fruits of the campaign just ended. The capital is preoccupied with a seemingly clash between the White

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House and the Congress. Mr. Nixon spoke to that issue, too, declaring with surprising equanimity an unsailable right to refuse to spend money as Congress directed him to — at the same time that members of Congress were deliberating about means to spell out their belief that he had no such right. [Details, Page 18.] But the Democrats who control the Congress were likely to be interested in the discussion, however premature, about the prospects of a nominal Democrat winding up on the Republican ticket in 1976.

Whether or not Mr. Connally

is a candidate and whether or not he has the support of President Nixon, partisans of Vice President Agnew profess to believe that Mr. Connally cannot make it — at least on the Republican ticket.

Victor Gold, who has just given up his job as press secretary to Mr. Agnew, but remains close to the Vice President, said in a conversation today that it was inconceivable that a Republican convention would turn to a “Roosevelt-Kennedy-Johnson Democrat,” when there were “two dozen Republicans available.”

He said the Republican party must grow among blacks and

young voters. “But is John Connally going to attract them with his \$250 suits?” Mr. Gold asked.

Alluding to a report from the Agnew camp that the Nixon Administration would try to build up Mr. Connally by making him Secretary of State, Mr. Gold said that, if indeed that did happen, Mr. Connally would “be the first guy who dug himself out of the swamplands of Foggy Bottom to win the Presidential nomination of the other party.” Foggy Bottom is the site of the State Department.

Mr. Gold also quoted what he called on “old Southern say-

ing from the Bible: ‘A setting sun giveth little strength’ — a presumed allusion to the fact that Mr. Nixon has entered his second term as President and is ineligible to seek re-election.

Today at the White House, the “setting sun” seemed very benign. A smile lurked around Mr. Nixon's lips and eyes as he dispensed political advice to potential successors and scored points against the adversary he never forgets—the news media.

Declaring that “we have finally achieved a peace with honor,” the President told the newsmen clustered around him in the small, hot White House

briefing room, “I know it gags some of you to write that phrase, but it is true, and most Americans realize it is true. . .” [Question 3, Page 20.]

Later, Mr. Nixon remarked that two and a half million Americans had given two or three years of their lives to serving in a war that “had very little support among the so-called better people in the media and the intellectual circles and the rest.”

He was talking then about an amnesty for draft evaders and deserters. The lurking smile had disappeared. His jaw had hardened.

“Those who deserted must

pay their price,” the President said, “and the price is not a junket in the Peace Corps.”

The respectful questions and the assertive replies led some to wonder why the President has a reputation for avoiding news conferences—why he had not held one since Oct. 5, 1972, before his re-election. It seemed that he had taken strength from the election returns, one of the greatest political victories in American history.

From a distance of 15 feet, Mr. Nixon showed no signs of nervousness. He did not hesitate. He was not tongue-tied. Indeed, he was so voluble that his replies seemed longer than before. He answered 15 questions in 36 minutes, as against 17 questions in 38 minutes at the Oct. 5 session.

The information bank in his head was full of details. Not only did he remember the last name of one of five American prisoners held in China — John T. Downey — but he was also able to recall the length of his sentence — 30 years, commuted to five. He also knew, and said for the first time, that Mr. Downey was an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency. (Question 15, Page 20.)



Associated Press

President Nixon gesturing during his news conference yesterday in Washington