

Nixon Set To Fight to Keep Office

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler yesterday confirmed reports that President Nixon is telling visitors he is prepared to wage a stubborn fight to the finish to hold on to his office.

At the same time, Ziegler strongly hinted that the President is in no mood at the present time to cooperate with the Senate Watergate committee, with which he has long been at odds, or with the House Judiciary Committee, which is considering an impeachment resolution.

Rep. G. V. Montgomery (D-Miss.), one of a group of Southern Democrats who conferred with the President Wednesday, quoted the President as saying it would be "unthinkable" for him to step down.

"It's unthinkable that I would resign," Montgomery quoted the President as saying. "I'll fight it right down to the wire."

The day before, Rep. Peter H. B. Freylinghuysen (R-N.J.) said the President told a GOP group Tuesday that, "there is a time to be timid. There is a time to be conciliatory. There is a time to fly and there is a time to fight. And I'm going to fight like hell."

Last week, the White House confirmed reports that the President has no intention of carrying forward "Operation Candor," the campaign launched last fall to try to answer Watergate charges.

Now the strategy appears to be to concede nothing and to try to persuade Congress and the public that Mr. Nixon is too busy running the government to be bothered by Watergate.

Since the President's return from California Jan. 13, he has conferred with a large number of congressmen and already has sent Congress two special messages — one on energy Wednesday and one on education yesterday.

In the past, the first message usually sent to Capitol Hill was the State of the Union message. But before delivering the State of the Union at 9 p.m. next Wednesday, the President also plans to send a message on veterans affairs, Ziegler said.

The State of the Union will be followed by the annual economic report on Friday and by the budget message Monday, Feb. 4.

There is hope at the White House that all this activity and especially the State of the Union will convince the voters that the President is governing the country and not being "consumed by Watergate."

Ziegler also gave a negative reply when asked if the President would cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee, but he did not give a direct "no."

Rather he said only that the committee "has not in any way communicated with us on how they intend to proceed, so I can't get in to a discussion of that."

Despite White House efforts to turn from Watergate-related issues, Senate Republican Whip Robert Griffin of Michigan spoke critically of the President in an interview with the Detroit News.

Noting that the President's position has "deteriorated," Griffin referred to Watergate as "a sordid mire" and said that the damage left in its wake has been "incalculable." But Griffin said it would be "inappropriate" for him to call for resignation or impeachment.

In New York, the financial magazine, Dun's Review, said a majority of 300 corporation heads it questioned want the President to resign.

However, the poll showed "overwhelming opposition" to impeachment, the magazine reported.

The magazine would not release the names of the business leaders who answered its questions, but it said the chief reason they gave in support of resignation was that the President "cannot regain the confidence of the people, so we need a fresh start."

When the magazine asked the corporate executives their preferences for President in 1976, they divided 52 per cent for former New York Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller, 25 per cent for former Texas Gov. John B. Connally, 8 per cent for California Gov. Ronald Reagan, 8 per cent for Sen. Charles Percy (R-Ill.), 5 per cent for Vice President Ford, and 2 per cent scattered.