

Conservatives Show Dismay on President

By Lou Cannon
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President Nixon was depicted yesterday by troubled conservatives as a man who had betrayed his principles and permitted the office of the presidency to be abused.

These same conservatives warned, however, that even greater damage would be done to the presidency and to the nation by removing Mr. Nixon from office except for the clearest legal cause. They also argued that conservatives will be jettisoning their own political principles if they abandon Mr. Nixon because of anticipated problems in the 1974 political campaign.

"One of the great lessons of the last year is the tragic fate of those who put loyalty to a man above loyalty to principle," said Rep. Robert Bauman (R-Md.).

Many of those attending a joint two-day conference of the American Conservative

Union and the Young Americans for Freedom appeared ready to abandon Mr. Nixon.

A number of delegates contended that Mr. Nixon had long ago abandoned any conservative principle.

Ronald F. Docksai, president of the Young Americans for Freedom, said Mr. Nixon should either make a complete, open explanation to Congress of his role in the Watergate affair or quit the presidency.

Rep. John Ashbrook of Ohio, a Republican challenger to Mr. Nixon in 1972, said the President had broken practically every campaign promise on major domestic and foreign policy issues. He said that conservatives could be destroyed in the 1974 elections by blindly following Mr. Nixon's leadership.

"I don't happen to belong

See **PRESIDENCY**, A12, Col. 2

PRESIDENCY, From A1

to that branch of the sheep family that follows a bellwether over the precipice," Ashbrook said.

Many of the speakers at the conference alternated scathing criticisms of Mr. Nixon with contentions that he has not committed an impeachable offense. William Rusher, publisher of the National Review, dismissed the call for impeachment of the President as a "response to a Puritan need . . . so that his going will be seen as the wages of sin."

However, Rusher said he was open-minded on the question of Mr. Nixon's resignation. And he denounced the "wrong-doing" of Watergate as the work of men committed to no fixed principles except loyalty to their leader.

"In the men around Nixon—the Haldeman-Ehrlichman types—we find in the White House for the first time a new managerial type . . ." Rusher said.

He characterized this new type as neither liberal nor conservative, but as essentially non-ideological, power-driven and obsessed with the need for personal loyalty to Mr. Nixon.

Rusher cited memos by former White House counsel John Dean III about "screwing out political enemies" and by former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson, who said he would "walk over my grandmother if necessary."

"We should have listened carefully," Rusher said.

He said that while conservatives were not responsible for Watergate, liberal political candidates would benefit and "are entitled to benefit."

"If the tables were reversed, I'm not sure how far my compassion would carry," he said.

Not every speaker ruled out impeachment.

Howard Phillips, a founder of YAF and the architect of Mr. Nixon's attempt to dismantle the Office of Economic Opportunity last year, said he was "not of one mind" on impeachment.

Phillips said he was "deeply concerned with the ease with which we have come to dismiss our Presidents," and he cited the murder of President Kennedy, the pressures that caused President Johnson not to seek re-election and the resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew which he said made Mr. Nixon's resignation "much more thinkable."

But he added, in a theme also sounded by other speakers, that a continuation of Mr. Nixon in office would mean the defeat of conservative candidates in 1974 and a "veto-proof Congress" during the last two years of the Nixon administration.

Bauman, appearing on the same panel with Phillips, warned that conservatives might be betraying their own principles much as Mr. Nixon had done if they called for the President's impeachment simply because he is a political liability.

"If Presidents can be thrown out because of their unpopularity, this country is verging on revolution," Bauman said.

He noted that he had only a 54 per cent voting record in support of the President and said his defense was "not of the man but of the office." Bauman is in his first term in Congress.

Throughout the day, delegates to the political action conference were assailed by two principal conflicting arguments. One was that conservatives should rally to Mr. Nixon's defense because he is under attack from liberal adversaries. The other was that conservatives should repair to a standard of principle and let Mr. Nixon take care of himself.

M. Stanton Evans, chairman of the American Conservative Union, said conservatives have historically rallied to Mr. Nixon's defense in his time of greatest trouble. He traced this back to 1956, when Harold Stassen was proposing that Mr. Nixon be replaced as President Eisenhower's Vice President by Christian Herter.

Ashbrook said loyalty to Mr. Nixon was "the worst possible trap we can fall into."

Ashbrook cited the conflict between Nixon statements and Nixon policies on inflation, wage-price control, detente with the Soviet Union and China and on "ethics and honesty in office."

He called upon conservative candidates, in effect, to put distance between themselves and Mr. Nixon by taking stands in opposition to the national health insurance and guarantee annual income proposals that the President is expected to propose to Congress.

At one point during the Rudher-Ashbrook panel, a delegates attempted to force a floor vote on the desirability of Mr. Nixon resignation, but this was headed off by Dan Joy, an Ashbrook aide, as "inappropriate" for the conference.

However, when a pro-Nixon delegate asked

whether conservatives couldn't, in the President's case, be accused of "failing to rescue their wounded," Rusher replied: "It may be that he's injured us so badly we can't."

Ashbrook, responding to the same question, quoted poet John Freenleaf Whittier:

"When faith is lost, when honor dies, the man is dead," he said.