

In a press conference in Little Rock the other day, Rep. Wilbur Mills, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and vice-chairman of the joint congressional committee that is studying Mr. Nixon's tax payment, had some extremely incautious things to say about the President's future — and his past. Having publicly advocated Mr. Nixon's resignation some time earlier, Mr. Mills predicted that it would come about as a consequence of some information that had turned up in the course of the joint committee's investigation. But he didn't say what it was. He only said that it was worse than anything turned up so far in connection with Watergate, in terms of its likely effect on a presidential decision to resign. "I can't say," Mr. Mills replied, when asked why he thought that "key Republican members of Congress" would pressure the President to resign if he is still in office by June. "I know, but I won't say," Mr. Mills went on, according to a UPI account. "You'll know about it in some 30 or 40 days."

Now, it is possible, of course, that Mr. Mills does know something; he is in a position to know a great deal about this matter. But that is just the point. Mr. Mills speaks with considerable authority as one of the most powerful and respected members of the House. And he has been privy to information made available to him by virtue of his position on the committee. That is all the more reason why he should refrain from making unsupported and unspecified charges of such monumental gravity. We

could hardly pretend that serious allegations against the President have not been revealed by the press in advance of formal, public presentation by whatever group or body may have been dealing with Watergate or other matters concerning Mr. Nixon over the past couple of years; some of these reports have also been attributed to anonymous sources; but all of them have been matters of substance which could be responded to on their merits and denied or clarified by the White House. That is quite different from simply saying "I've got a secret which would shock you if I could only tell it to you." And that, in effect, is what Mr. Mills has said.

It can, of course, be argued that when Mr. Nixon availed himself of a private citizen's right to every conceivable tax benefit, and then availed himself of a President's power to choose his auditors—namely a congressional committee rather than the Internal Revenue Service—that he was inviting this kind of trouble. By entrusting his tax returns to a political body, and promising to pay any back taxes it might assess, he was proposing a resolution of this issue which relieved him of the risk of penalties or punishments. But this procedure always carried with it the risk that unauthorized extracurricular politics would be played with his tax situation. He laid himself open, in other words, to "cheap shots"—and that, as the White House was quite justified in saying, is what he got from Mr. Mills the other day.