

Public Seems Resigned to

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The tourist line outside the White House stretched around the block yesterday as it always does on summer mornings, but some folks felt queasy about their pilgrimage.

"Welcome to the White House," said the loudspeakers tucked discreetly under the magnolias along the fence.

"It is a unique privilege," the tape-recorded tour guide explained, "for here is the only place in the world where the elected head of state regularly opens his official home to visitors."

Robert Smith of Durham, N.C., shuffled forward with his family in the long line. "I feel," Smith said, "like if I found that my minister was doing something that was immoral."

"President and Mrs. Nixon," the loudspeakers continued, "are delighted to have you visit this country's most historic home and, remember, even by passing through it you become part of its history."

Up and down the line, folks from Carolina and California and Alabama knew they were tourists in another chapter of history, the probable departure of Mr. Nixon. Some were pleased and some were bitter, but generally they seemed resigned to the outcome.

"It kind of degrades it," said Robbie Brown, a space worker from Huntsville, Ala. "I think people would like to believe the President is one of God's chosen few, like policemen and preachers and that sort of thing."

"It's our first trip here and it's kind of a weird thing," said Gordon Gallagher, surrounded by his family from Athens, Ga. "I can't explain it. It's like a shiny new automobile that's tarnished. Does that sound right?"

Gallagher's weird feeling of the moment was general in Washington yesterday. It was not at all what the town expected nine months ago when the clamor for impeachment first thundered. There was no storm of public opinion breaking over the town, one way or the other. The feeling was numb.

"We all know what the next step is," said Rep. Benjamin Rosenthal, the New York Democrat. "We're in a state of suspended animation. The curtain has come down. The show is over. The audience has gone home."

Rep. Thomas Railsback of Illinois, one of those Republicans who stuck his neck out for impeachment before

it became a popular consensus, said the mail has dwindled. "I can see why the mail from both sides would dry up," Railsback said. "Everybody knows it's all over."

Across Capitol Hill, senators and representatives were impressed, not by a great outpouring of public sentiment, but by the routine volume of the letters, calls and telegrams on the Nixon case. At the White House, the mail was also deemed light.

Western Union confirmed that impression. Since Mr. Nixon's spectacular confession on Monday, it has moved several thousand "public affairs" messages per day to Congress and the President—compared to a peak of 150,000 in one day last October when the "firestorm" of public outrage ignited over Mr. Nixon's firing of the Watergate prosecutor.

Rep. Harold Froehlich of Wisconsin, another Republican who went for impeachment in the Judiciary Committee deliberations, described the mild reaction he

encountered back home last weekend:

"I think people are tired of the whole situation and they want to get it over with and they're not interested in communicating their views any more."

Froehlich said he shook hands with about 500 voters and only about 75 of them brought up the subject. Of those, only 12 protested his pro-impeachment vote. "Seven of them did it agreeably," he said, "and five of them wanted to argue."

But it was not simply that people are tired of the subject. It also seemed that the public already had made up its mind about the case. The latest Gallup poll showed 64 per cent for impeachment, up 13 per cent from a month ago. The public-opinion surveys have indicated since last summer that a majority of the people were convinced Mr. Nixon was involved in Watergate and was not telling the whole truth.

When the President on Monday surrendered the missing transcript which incriminated him, it provided the decisive keystone in the evidence before Congress, sweeping away the Nixon defense arguments in a political storm. But the new evidence apparently didn't jar the public in the same way.

"Very clearly," said Rep. Jack Brooks, the Texas Democrat, "the people al-

Outcome

ready understood. It's just the Congress who hadn't gotten the word."

"The groundwork was pretty well laid for this final event," said Froehlich, "and people realize the world goes on."

Rep. Albert Quie, a senior Republican from Minnesota, said the President's belated confession did kick the props out from under his hard-line supporters, who are no longer phoning his district offices. "I think it was the last straw for them, too," Quie said.

For history's sake, this may be an important element in current events. The last time Congress approached impeachment, back in 1868, the episode was so enflamed and bitter that it scared Congress away from the weapon for 100 years. Ironically, Mr. Nixon's last gesture of candor may have inadvertently created something of a popular consensus which will dampen the lingering bad feelings.

Certainly, it improved the mood of the House of Representatives. The congressmen, especially the Republicans, were increasingly tense and irritable as the impeachment decision approached them, but Mr. Nixon's confession wiped out their fears. One sure sign that presidential removal has lost its explosive quality is the clubhouse humor circulating again in the Capitol cloakrooms.

Rep. G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery (D-Miss.), one of the President's last loyal supporters, wisecracked to colleagues: "I'm going down with the Sequoia."

And Rep. Otto Passman (D-La.), another loyalist, explained to friends why he was sticking with Mr. Nixon. "To err is human," he said. "To forgive is divine."

"To impeach is constitutional," a Southern brother replied.

It was almost a giddy atmosphere, as Congressman Quie described it. Politicians who for months faced a roll call that could end their careers now feel they are clear of the danger.

"It reminds me of one time when I was coming down the mountain with a

horse trailer and two horses behind me," Quie said. "The road was slippery and I kept going faster and faster and I couldn't slow down. When I got to the bottom safely, I just burst out laughing, the tension was so great."

Rep. Peter W. Rodino Jr., who as Judiciary Committee chairman played such a pivotal role in the accumulating events, seemed torn by conflicting emotions—sadness for the tragedy of it, but awe for the constitutional system which worked so effectively.

"The people haven't expressed it this way, but it's a sad realization that these things have to be," the chairman said. "It's all fraught with unquestioned sadness. I feel it. My family

feels very distressed. No glee, no nothing."

Still, Rodino added, "This has proved what I believed all the while—I had every confidence in the ability of the country to withstand this. It's the system that works. We've all survived. This thing at first looks terrible to all of us. To me, I revere the Presidency. I respect the President. But the Republic stands first."

Back at the White House, there were mixed feelings in the tourist line about whether Rodino and his colleagues have served the Republic well.

Mrs. Lynne Smith, an Army nurse from Tacoma, Wash., was bitter at the outcome. "I really didn't think it would go this far," she

said, "I thought they would drop it. It's all politics, it's all dirty."

Ed Lassiter, another Nixon supporter from Kingston, N.C., said he reluctantly concluded in the last few days that his President was finished.

"Maybe," Lassiter mused, "he could have been a little more honest, a little quicker. The people would have backed him on it."