

# Reporter's Diary: A 3-Month Chronicle of the

By PHILIP SHABECOFF

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8—Observing the disintegration of Richard Nixon's Presidency at close hand over the last few months has been like watching a terminal illness.

There have been brief remissions and fleeting hopes of recovery. But with each passing week, Mr. Nixon's political strength declined from crisis to crisis until the momentum for his removal from office turned into an avalanche.

What follows is the diary of a reporter assigned to cover the White House on May 10, 1974—less than three months ago. In those three months, Mr. Nixon's early departure from his high office changed drastically from mere possibility.

This diary, therefore, is a chronicle of the last days of Mr. Nixon's Presidency.

## MAY 10

This could be an awfully short assignment. Rumors that the President is about to resign are flying all over the city. The rumor mill is generated by intensely negative public and Congressional reaction to the transcript of White House conversations released by the President last week.

The rumors have an urgent tone: The President is calling an emergency Cabinet meeting. Henry A. Kissinger is interrupting his peace mission in the Middle East to fly back to Washington. The President is going to go on national television with an important speech.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the President's confidant and press secretary, calls the Washington bureau of The New York Times to say that all the rumors are false.

## MAY 11

A lovely green and sunny Saturday. Julie and David Eisenhower hold a press conference on the White House lawn and say that the President has no intention of resigning. Mr. Nixon flies to Oklahoma. It's a campaign trip of a sort.

## MAY 13

The mood in the White House has changed palpably. The faintly hysterical edginess is gone. Ken W. Clawson, the White House director of communications, says at lunch: "We will weather the storm."

## MAY 15

An uneventful day at the regular White House news briefing. Gerald L. Warren, the deputy White House press secretary, declined to comment on a new subpoena for tape recordings issued by the House Judiciary Committee.

Somebody asks if the briefing sessions are tape-recorded and Warren replies yes, but "Don't worry, the tapes self-destruct." Everybody chuckles. A reporter in the back of the room says, "You know, Gerry, this is the first time in a year we've laughed together."

May 16—The President feels "concern" for his former appointments secretary, Dwight Chapin, who was sentenced to prison yesterday, Gerry Warren says. "The President feels Mr. Chapin is a fine young man," Mr. Warren adds.

The President leaves for a long weekend in Key Biscayne, Fla.

May 17—The White House press corps sits in a hot, stuffy little building across the street from the Four Ambassadors Hotel in Miami snapping like hungry trout at bits of information about the President. Mr. Nixon, several miles away in Key Biscayne, decided to remove himself even further by flying by helicopter to Grand Cay, the private island belonging to his friend, Robert Abplanalp.

## May 18

The President is still at Grand Cay, reportedly doing little but strolling and sleeping. He must be a tired man.

## May 19

There has been talk of a radio address by the President on national health insurance at noon today. But as late as 11:15 in the morning, White House aides are still unable to say whether or not the speech will be made. Finally the word comes down: The speech will be tomorrow.

## May 20

President makes radio address and then flies back to Washington. Reporters are allowed to watch him board his Air-Force jet, The Spirit of '76. The Presidential party flies to Homestead Air Force Base in three big helicopters. King Timahoe, his friendly Irish setter, and a couple of unfamiliar terriers arrive in the second helicopter with members of the staff. The President and his wife are on the last chopper. Until now, have not actually seen Mr. Nixon in the flesh since starting this assignment. He looks fit physically but somewhat down emotionally.

## MAY 29

Find business as usual in White House briefing room after week's absence. These are some of questions reporters ask Gerry Warren:

Why is the President delaying the impeachment hearings? Should a suspected criminal be allowed to decide which evidence is necessary and which is not?

Gerry, why don't you tell us anything?

The President makes a rare appearance in the briefing room to announce that Secretary of State Kissinger has reached a tentative peace settlement in the Middle East. Mr. Nixon may relish the moment but his face seems oddly stiff as he talks.

In the evening, the President has 11 conservative Congressmen aboard the yacht Sequoia for dinner.

## MAY 30

Trip to Moscow set and announcement of journey to Middle East expected any day now.

## MAY 31

The Supreme Court rules against the President and agrees to take the appeal of the special Watergate Prosecutor, who is demanding evidence to the White House. A blow to the President's lawyers.

But the impeachment shadows appear to be dispelled for the moment by the diplomatic triumphs of Henry Kissinger. The words "Watergate" and "impeachment" are not even mentioned at the daily briefing—the first time this has happened in many months, according to veterans on the White House beat.

The President to spend the weekend at Camp David.

## JUNE 3

James D. St. Clair and other White House officials pointedly decline to reaffirm previously stated position that the President of the United States would obey a definitive ruling by the Supreme Court.

## JUNE 5

The President talks of peace in a commencement address at the Naval Academy. He also flips Frisbee and flies toy plane given him by graduates, appearing amiable but awkward while doing so.

## JUNE 10

The President leaves for the Middle East. The White House is quiet.

But Mr. St. Clair issues a letter by the President telling the House Judiciary Committee that a subpoena for White House tapes will not be obeyed. Mr. Nixon says that compliance with the committee's request would destroy the constitutional separation of powers. Chairman Rodino replies that the committee may draw adverse inferences from the refusal to provide the requested evidence.

## JUNE 13

Am introduced by Ken Clawson to several White House officials including J. Fred Buzhardt, one of the President's chief lawyers. Mr. Buzhardt, who has been defending the President for years, exchanges pleasantries but looks fragile and ashen.

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# Last Days of the Nixon Presidency

continue to dominate the news. White House aides are complaining of leaks from the Judiciary Committee, saying they are robbing the President of a fair hearing.

#### JUNE 21

The President is off to Camp David after only one full day back in Washington. Why is it that Mr. Nixon, who has spent most of his life seeking offices that would keep him in Washington, flees the city at every opportunity?

Charles Colson is sentenced to one to three years in prison and says, in effect, that the President put him up to trying to defame Daniel Ellsberg.

#### JUNE 24

The President has phlebitis. It turns out to be a disease that causes an inflammation of the veins. Speculation immediately begins that the President may now say that ill health will force him to resign. Such is the mood of this city.

#### JUNE 25

The President departs for Brussels and Moscow.

#### JULY 4

This is the President's first day back from the Soviet Union and he's already down here in Key Biscayne. He didn't even stop over in Washington. He flew straight down from Maine, where he gave his televised report on the trip. It isn't Watergate or impeachment that drives him from Washington. It was this way from the beginning of his Administration.

The President's doctor, Walter Tkach, says that Mr.

Nixon risked his life by going on the Mideast trip with phlebitis, which causes a blood clot in his leg.

#### JULY 6

President goes out to dinner at Key Biscayne hotel where he dances with little girl to tune of "Thank Heaven for Little Girls."

#### JULY 8 RETURNED 7:42

The President is back in Washington. The Supreme Court takes up "The United States vs. Richard Nixon et al."

#### JULY 9

White House aides are saying that the drive for impeachment has lost its steam and that the crisis of Mr. Nixon's Presidency is ebbing. "We are very confident," says Raymond K. Price, who writes many of the President's speeches.

#### JULY 12-28

Mr. Nixon is having a working vacation at La Casa Pacifica, his oceanside estate in San Clemente. The weather in Southern California is perfect: blue skies, warm days, cool nights and just the right amount of fog for early morning strolls along the beach.

The only major business the President has brought with him is the preparation of an economic speech. But the roof falls in while he is here. The crisis on Cyprus is the least of the problems he has to face. Two events move like shadows—perhaps foreshadows of impeachment—across the California sun.

One is the unanimous Supreme Court ruling that Mr. Nixon could not claim absolute executive privilege

and must therefore surrender the evidence demanded by the special Watergate prosecutor.

The other is the televised debate of the House Judiciary Committee and the adoption of a first article of impeachment charging Mr. Nixon with the obstruction of justice.

The White House staff seems uncertain and distressed. Mr. Ziegler lashes out at the committee and accuses its chief counsel, John Doar, of conducting a "kangaroo court." Once remote officials are suddenly accessible. Reporters are urged to conduct interviews with members of the staff who until recently would not even return phone calls. Gen. Alexander Haig invites reporters to his rented house next to the Nixon estate for cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and small talk.

Saturday, the day before the President is scheduled to return to Washington, Mr. Ziegler says that the White House is "absolutely" confident that the full House of Representatives will reject impeachment articles recommended by the Judiciary Committee. The reason, he insists, is that the evidence does not support the charges.

#### JULY 29

The Judiciary passes a second article charging the President with abuse of power: "We are confident because we have great respect for the House," says a White House spokesman.

#### JULY 30

A third article is passed charging Mr. Nixon with failure to obey lawful subpoenas.  
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#### JULY 31

**Early Morning:** Patrick J. Buchanan, special consultant to the President, says President has not shut the door to a plan that would bypass debate in House and take impeachment directly to Senate trial.

**Midday:** Gerry Warren says the plan is not being actively considered but that no decision has been reached. He declines to reaffirm confidence that full House will reject impeachment articles.

**Mid-afternoon:** House Republicans say they will not countenance plan to bypass debate.

**Late Afternoon:** White House acknowledged that trial balloon has been shot down.

Meanwhile, John D. Ehrlichman, former No. 2 man on the White House staff, is sentenced to 20 months to five years in prison.

#### AUG. 1

The White House will no longer answer questions about its strategy to keep Mr. Nixon in office.

#### AUG. 2

Next week the Rules Committee prepares for the House impeachment debate.

Mr. Warren says, for the fifth time this week, that the President will not resign.

But rumors are starting to circulate again.

John W. Dean 3d is sentenced to one to four years in prison.

#### AUG. 3

Assuming it will be a quiet week with impeachment in Rules Committee, leave for Berkshire mountains to squeeze in week's vacation.

#### AUG. 4

It was a mistake to leave Washington. The President has called his top aides and speech writers to Camp David. Even on the remote mountaintop the vibrations from Washington signal that something big is about to happen. Will it be resignation?

#### AUG. 5

It's not resignation. The President, still fighting to hold on to his office, releases transcripts of conversations with H. R. Haldeman which show he knew of Watergate cover-up. In astonishing statement of culpability, he says he was wrong to withhold information from his own legal staff as well as Judiciary Committee. At Cabinet meeting he starts off by saying that he is about to discuss something everybody in the country is concerned about the economy.

#### AUG. 6

Return to Washington on first available plane. The President's support in Congress has evaporated. His staunchest defenders on the Judiciary Committee now call for his impeachment.

The President's spokesmen insist that he will fight against removal from office to the end of the constitutional process. But what ground does he have left to stand and fight on?

The President spends 35 minutes with Baruch Korff, the "small-town rabbi" who leads Mr. Nixon's "grass roots" supporters. He does not see any members of Congress.

#### AUG. 7

The capital city preoccupied by one question today—Is President Nixon about to resign? That his days in office are numbered in any case seemed to be accepted as a matter of course by members of Congress, the press and almost any passer-by in the streets.

Subjects that were heretofore discussed in whispers if at all are now the fodder of casual conversation. Will Mr. Nixon be subject to criminal prosecution when he leaves his high office? Who will be Gerald Ford's Vice President?

The President sees the Republican leaders of Congress at his own request and after the meeting one of them, House Republican leader John Rhodes, says he does not know if the President will resign.

Crowds stand outside the White House fence—waiting.

#### AUG. 8

Richard M. Nixon announces resignation as President of the United States.



The New York Times/George Tammes  
On May 11, Julie Eisenhower and her husband, David, defended the President at a White House news meeting.



The New York Times/Mike Lien  
On June 5, as he and Mrs. Nixon attended commencement, at Annapolis, the President joyfully tossed a Frisbee given him. It was one of a number of mementos—including a toy alligator—presented by midshipmen companies.