

Johnson's Health Pictured as Retirement Factor

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WASHINGTON, July 8—Fear that he might not live through another term in office influenced President Johnson in his decision not to seek re-election, says Drew Pearson, syndicated columnist.

In the current issue of Look magazine, in an article entitled "The Ghosts That Haunted LBJ—The True Story of His Decision to Withdraw," Mr. Pearson gives several embellishments to previously published accounts of the factors that led Mr. Johnson to withdraw from the Presidential contest.

Mr. Pearson's article contains extensive direct quotations from Mr. Johnson but is not described as an interview with the President.

Mr. Pearson said today he could not comment on whether or not his material came from the President. Other informed sources said, however, that the columnist had had a meeting with the President and had later submitted his manuscript to the White House for review.

The article agrees with other accounts in saying that a major reason for the President's decision was his desire to remove the office of the Presidency from partisan politics while he attempted to reach a negotiated peace in Vietnam.

But Mr. Pearson's account adds that the President was also motivated by the possibility that his health—although good—might not hold up during four more years in office.

On the morning of March 31 Mr. Johnson went to the Washington apartment of Vice President Humphrey to tell him that, in a television address that night, Mr. Johnson would withdraw from the race. Mr. Pearson quotes the President as having said to Mr. Humphrey:

"I'm tired. I'm getting old. All the men in my family have a record of not living much over the age of 60. I'll be 60 this summer. I've had a heart attack. My health is pretty good. I think my chart is as good as yours. But I'm not sure I could live out another term."

At another point in his article, Mr. Pearson said the President had once said that his family had a record of strokes or cerebral hemorrhages and that "I could see myself as

Columnist Reports President Doubted He Could Stand Strain of Another Term

another Woodrow Wilson. It would not be fair to the country."

Some friends of the President expressed doubt today that health had been a very important factor in his decision not to seek renomination. Others familiar with the President noted that his anecdotal style is such that his accounts of the same incident often vary widely.

The article by Mr. Pearson also indicated that hostility against the President had contributed to his decision. It said, without quoting Mr. Johnson directly, that six men had scaled the white house fence last year "bent on killing him, and 12,000 letters had been sent threatening his life."

The article said that Mr. Johnson had "once confided" that "I think I could get renominated. I think I could get re-elected. But the stockholders are dissatisfied. Perhaps we need a new President."

As a matter of policy, the Secret Service will not release precise information on abortive attempts to harm a President. Other sources familiar with the White House, however, said that only about 50 death threat letters are received every year.

In the fiscal year that ended June 30, 1967, 323 "unwelcome visitors," or persons attempting to gain entry to the White House were detained by the White House police, according to testimony before a Congressional budget hearing.

Almost all of these were "mental" cases, the sources said, and not regarded as attempted assassins.

It could not be determined today, however, if six armed men had scaled the White House fence last year, as Mr. Pearson reported.

Mr. Pearson also says in his article that "the final clincher" among the factors persuading Mr. Johnson to withdraw from politics was the arrival of his daughter Lynda Bird, Mrs. Charles S. Robb, at the White House at 6:30 A.M. on the morning of the speech of March 31.

Mrs. Robb had been in Cali-

fornia to say farewell to her husband, a captain in the Marine Corps, who was leaving for Vietnam.

The article quotes Mr. Johnson as saying he "pulled a pair of britches over my pajamas" to go out to the south gate of the White House to meet his daughter.

"She was pale as a ghost," the article quotes the President as saying. "She talked to me about what a fine boy Chuck was, in the past tense, as if he was never coming back. And she said:

"Daddy, 'I want to ask you a question. Why do we have to fight over there when so many people are opposed to the war? Why do we have to send 200 boys over there in Chuck's [Marine] company when there's so much opposition here at home to the war?'"

Mr. Pearson writes that the President "decided to put every thing he had—his future in politics, his whole stack—on a big gamble for peace."

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The article also asserts that Mr. Johnson had planned to make a statement withdrawing from the Presidential contest as part of his State of the Union message last January and had failed to do so only because he had misplaced the secret text of the passage announcing he would not seek renomination.

The Pearson account quotes the President as having later told Vice President Humphrey that "when I got to the right place in the message I reached into my pocket to get the excerpt and found it wasn't there."

"I had given it to Lady Bird before she went off to the beauty parlor," the quotation goes on "When I got back home I raised Cain with Lady Bird."

"What the dickens did you do with that message?" I asked her. "Then we went into the bedroom and found it by my telephone. I don't know how it got there. I guess I must have put it there myself."

Other authoritative White House sources had previously told newsmen that Mr. Johnson had decided, before going to Capitol Hill to give the State of the Union Message, against making a withdrawal statement.