

F-Pink
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Morale Ebbs For White

WASHINGTON (AP) — The morale of the President, it is said repeatedly, remains strong. The mood of some of the men who work for him is something else.

"What will I tell my children?" asks one of Richard Nixon's disenchanted assistants. "I never heard of anybody bragging that his grandfather worked for Warren Harding."

"Every day I come in here is a question of conscience," said another man who is on the President's staff, just below senior level. "My wife has been asking and I have begun asking myself, 'Well, is he or isn't he really dishonest?'"

Strong stuff, especially when heard within shouting distance of Richard Nixon. It is never shouted. Nor can it be said how widespread this feeling is in his staff. Most people consulted for this report appeared steadfast. Some, definitely not, especially since publication of the presidential conversations.

Generally, the atmospherics of the White House these days suggest an administration hungry for small consolations.

Assessing gains and losses in the fortnight of Firestorm II, Deputy Press Secretary Gerald Warren, for example, is quick to point out that the newspaper story of alleged ethnic slurs by the President "did not take hold."

The house of the President seems so busy on defense that the larger question of who finally will win the Super Bowl is lost in the fact that the other side hasn't scored in the last 10 minutes.

The big plays don't seem to work. Publish the President's tax returns. Uproar. Publish his private conversations. Uproar. You gain 4 yards and lose 40.

For Richard Nixon, who calls himself the quarterback and coach, it has been catch-up football all the way since Watergate. But even steadfast loyalists agree he is a long way from catching up.

On April 29, the night he called his boldest play, he appeared to be aware he might be doing something fateful. Coming into the Oval Office for his television speech about the transcripts, he asked why they were stacked on a table instead of his desk. "They look better over there," he was told.

Some moments later, after being diverted by light and sound level tests, he gravitated back to the transcripts. He picked one off the top, fingered it quietly, shook his head from side to side and tossed it back.

It is now said by a variety of White House sources that the President anticipated the initial shock wave of reaction to the profanity and tone of his transcripts.

But he also expected that the second wave, on reflection, would bring a "more sophisticated reaction," especially in Congress, that people would see the transcripts clearly showed he was a man desperately in search of the facts about Watergate and, once assembled, would get them out.

The reaction has not yet come, despite strenuous White House efforts to guide the country on the path to perspective. Those efforts included a press conference featuring the President's daughter, a series of homilies on morality by a Jesuit priest, and a short lecture by one of the President's political strategists on what Republicans owe Richard Nixon.

That the desired public reaction to the transcripts has not come, has, according to loyalists and waverers alike, disappointed and frustrated the President.