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Nixon Counterattacks...

President Nixon's message to Congress is more a propaganda effort to restore the Administration's crippled prestige than a serious attempt to engage in a constructive dialogue concerning legislation. Mr. Nixon ranged across more than fifty legislative proposals from the Alaska pipeline to the restoration of the death penalty, from school busing to the problem of conversion to the metric system.

These measures are not of equal weight or urgency, but together they serve to create the impression of activity and concern on the part of an Administration that has been reeling for months from the Watergate scandals.

Mr. Nixon adopted a conciliatory tone and referred several times to opportunities for compromise, but beneath the rhetorical surface he has yielded nothing of substance. Education and social welfare programs that the President has never liked are once again caricatured as "rigid, narrow, fragmented and encumbered with red tape." A tax increase is once again barred from consideration and tax reform left purposely vague. The military budget is again defended as sacred and untouchable. No ideas for campaign reform are set forth except the discredited nostrum of a study commission.

The President quite gratuitously revived the emotion-laden argument about school busing—a subject that has been blessedly quiescent for many months. Several constructive programs are endorsed in broad principle such as the National Land Use Policy Act and help for the bankrupt Northeastern railroads, but the endorsements are hedged by the usual Nixonian strictures against imposing "an excessive financial burden on the Federal Government"—in short, that beautiful chassis minus a motor, which the President so often favors.

"There are, of course, certain principles of vital national concern which cannot be compromised—the need for budgetary discipline, for a strong national security posture, and for the preservation of the requisite powers of the Executive branch," the President declared.

In that reference to "requisite powers," and in his discussion of "reserving" appropriated funds to combat what he terms Congress's "budget-busting" proclivities, Mr. Nixon is hinting that even those hoary ghosts of pre-Watergate days—executive privilege and impoundment of funds—have not been laid to rest by the White House. The Democratic majorities in the House and Senate are thus on notice that if any compromising is to be done, Congress will be expected to do the yielding.

* From report by Neil Sheehan, NYTimes, 6 Sep 65 (filed Nixon), on Nixon press conference in Saigon:

Under questioning, Mr. Nixon said that if the word "negotiations" implied concessions by both sides, he was opposed to any negotiations.