



The Fine Print Of Nixon's Address

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THE TERRIBLE TRAP President Nixon has dug for himself is defined exactly by his State of the Union message. In order to rally his followers, the President has to sound confident and upbeat, as he did in the message actually delivered to the Congress and seen on television.

But the facts, as laid out in the full written text of the message, do not justify ringing claims. The effect is to deepen public mistrust of Mr. Nixon, which goes to the heart of his basic problem and thus promotes even more the chance that he will be forced out of office one way or another.

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CONSIDER FIRST the major claim staked by the President. That is the claim that the economy will be in good shape this year. "Let me speak to that issue head-on," he said boldly in the remarks delivered to the Congress and over television. "There will be no recession in the United States."

But in his written remarks, Mr. Nixon was far more cautious:

"We have known for some time that a slowdown of economic growth is inevitable in 1974 . . . unfortunately the very mild slowdown which we anticipated in 1974 now threatens to be more pronounced . . . we expect, therefore, that during the early part of this year output will rise little if at all, unemployment will rise somewhat and inflation will be high."

To most Americans, a recession is precisely stagnant output and rising unemployment. The addition of high inflation hardly makes matters better. So the President's boast, on examination, turns out to

have no foundation. The more so as he seems to have no timely measures in mind for perking up the slumping economy.

Consider next the cheery note sounded by Mr. Nixon with respect to the energy crisis. In his spoken address to the Congress and the nation, the big emphasis was on "a goal to which I am deeply dedicated. Let us do everything we can to avoid gasoline rationing." On top of that, the President announced that "I have been assured, through my personal contacts with friendly leaders in the Middle East area, that an urgent meeting will be called in the immediate future to discuss the lifting of the oil embargo."

But the fine print of the written message struck a different note. There was no stuff about avoiding rationing, nor about "my personal contacts with friendly leaders" in the Near East. On the contrary, the fine print said: "We still face genuine shortages . . . and sharply increased prices."

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WHAT THIS says to me is that Mr. Nixon is once more trying to con the American public. On television he makes marvelous music and paints beautiful pictures. He seems to promise no rationing and no recession. In fact, he knows full well that the promises are dubious.

My sense is that the President is deepening his troubles. He has once more shown cynical disregard for keeping faith with the American people. He is once more misrepresenting. He is once more abusing the popular trust which in this country is the fount of legitimacy.