

# Business World Silence on Nixon

Washington

A large majority of American business and financial leaders — the group from which President Nixon drew his strongest political and financial support in 1972 — now refuses to register either support or criticism of the President.

The business leaders prefer to remain silent even when assured their answers to a nationwide survey will be held confidential.

In recent days, Los Angeles Times reporters have asked questions directly or through aides to the chief executives of 51 prominent corporations, seeking their views of Mr. Nixon's presidential stewardship.

Of this group, most of whom are Republicans and nearly all of whom backed Mr. Nixon's re-election two years ago, 33 — or nearly 65 per cent — would not answer the questions.

Of those who did respond — some in confidence and others who allowed their names to be used — only 22 per cent said they approved of the way Mr. Nixon is handling his job as President.

Half the respondents said they supported Mr. Nixon in 1972.

Some of the 33 who refused to respond to the Times questionnaire, such as Rawleigh Warner Jr., chairman of Mobil Oil Corp., said they had long-standing policies of refraining from partisan political activity.

But most of the 33 — at least 22, based on an examination of government records — are no strangers to partisanship, having contributed substantial sums to President Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign.

Some of these business leaders appeared to fear adding to the momentum of

the impeachment drive by giving their opinion, even anonymously.

The Times survey list consisted of the 65 active members of the Business Council, a prestigious group of corporate chief executives that meets periodically with top government officials to discuss economic policy matters.

Represented on the council are the heads of the nation's half-dozen biggest manufacturers, the three biggest banks, and the biggest utility and retailing firms.

Of the 65 active Business Council members, 14 could not be reached because they were out of the country or were otherwise not in touch with their offices.

The survey found Mr. Nixon retains some strong supporters in the business community, although only one — Donald M. Kendall, chairman of Pepsico, Inc., the big soft drink and snack food producers — was willing to have his name used.

Kendall said he approves of the way Mr. Nixon is handling the presidency and warned that the nation would be hurt if he is forced from office.

Vice President Ford's relative inexperience in international affairs could cause the United States to lose leverage in international negotiations and thus would risk damaging world peace and the international economy, added another strong Nixon supporter, the chairman of a leading California-based manufacturing concern.

In general, however, the views of the respondents were at best neutral and at worst antagonistic to Mr. Nixon.

About 39 per cent said they disapproved of his performance in the presidency. An equivalent number said they could not make a judgment, because while they generally approved of the President's foreign policy moves, they have reservations about his domestic actions.

"I'd have to give him higher marks on foreign policy than domestic policy," said Lynn A. Townsend, chairman of Chrysler Corp., the nation's third largest automaker. As for Mr. Nixon's handling of Watergate, Townsend said, "It does not look like a very astute job to me."

The 50 per cent of the respondents who said they favor resignation by the President gave a variety of reasons.

Some were harsh.

"He (Mr. Nixon) has exercised bad judgment, poor leadership and bad follow-up," said the chairman of a big Midwest machinery producer.

"He's doing extreme damage to the Republican Party and he has demonstrated disrespect for what I call the ethics of the office," said the chief of a corporation based in the South.

Others said they favor resignation as the only way to end the turmoil over impeachment.

"I don't think he has been treated fairly or that there is valid cause for his resigning," said the chairman of a large, diversified firm based in the Mideast. "But in view of the tremendous pressures on him — admittedly biased pressures — for the good of the country, he probably should resign."

Some of those who opposed resignation said they did so because they believed the impeachment mechanism established by the Constitution should not be bypassed.

Los Angeles Times