

Politicians' Reaction To Nixon's Comments

Washington

"He seemed to be a broken man," Representative Robert McClory of Illinois said yesterday after watching former President Richard M. Nixon make his first public comments on the Watergate scandal in almost three years.

A Republican member of the House Judiciary Committee who initially defended Nixon but finally voted for impeachment, McClory said the former President "came off very poorly" in his televised interview. "I was pleased to have his apology to the American people," McClory said. "I wished we would have heard an apology to the Republican party."

McClory's expression of sympathy for Nixon as an individual, together with his feeling that the former President had stopped short of a full acknowledgement of what he had done, was typical of the reactions of persons who had played prominent roles in Watergate.

Representatives Peter Rodino (Dem-N.J.), chairman of the Judiciary Committee which in 1974 voted three articles of impeachment against Nixon, said, "It made me sad to see a president of the United States trying one way or the other to explain away the facts. You can't rewrite history."

Similarly, former Senator Sam J. Ervin, the North Carolina Democrat who headed the Senate Watergate committee, said "I think it's good for the people to see it, because he's still covering up."

Ervin, who had not planned to watch the interview because he was traveling home to North Carolina by air from a speaking engagement in Oklahoma, was spotted by a reporter in the lobby of the Memphis Airport and persuaded to watch the broadcast on a barroom television set.

"I'm glad I didn't miss this one, but I don't care about the other (Nixon interviews to be shown later)," he said.

Senator Barry Goldwater (Rep-Ariz.), one of Nixon's strongest

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supporters during most of his Watergate agony, however, said he felt no pity now.

"He's as dead as he can be," Goldwater said. "I have no sympathy for him at all."

Some of the politicians who played featured roles in the Watergate drama seemed angry at Nixon's decision to break his self-imposed silence for a reported \$600,000 fee.

"I don't think it was a very wise decision to subject himself to prosecution on television for money," said McClory.

Former Representative Jerome Waldie (Dem-Calif.), also a member of the Judiciary Committee during the impeachment inquiry, said his 18-year-old son asked as the family watched the broadcast, "Dad, why

is Nixon doing this to himself?"

"For a million dollars," Waldie said he responded.

Three attorneys who played important parts in the drama that preceded Nixon's resignation agreed that the former President's admission that he had issued misleading statements and had "let down the country" came close to a confession of wrongdoing.

Henry E. Petersen, the assistant attorney general who headed the Justice Department's investigation of the Watergate break-in before the appointment of the special prosecutor, said Nixon's comments were "as much of a confession" as could be expected.

"It was a great concession," Petersen said. "You can't expect him to say, 'I'm a gross criminal,' as (interviewer David) Frost apparently expected. Man is capable of too



AP Wirephoto

BARRY GOLDWATER 'No sympathy for him'

much rationalization for that. If you catch a man coming out from robbing a bank, he won't admit that."

Fred D. Thompson, the Nashville, Tenn., attorney who served as Republican counsel on the Senate Watergate committee, said, "What he did was understandable — not justifiable, but understandable. My personal opinion is that a jury would probably convict him."

James Neal, the assistant special prosecutor who prosecuted Nixon's top aides in the Watergate coverup trial, said he was gratified to hear Nixon admit that he misled the public.

"He admitted that he had to resign because of his own faults," Neal said. "Have you ever heard him say that before? It certainly wasn't a confession, but it was more that way than I expected."

Representative Charles E. Wiggins (Rep-Calif.), regarded as Nixon's most articulate defender during the Judiciary Committee hearings, said Nixon "told the truth" on the essential points.

On the interview itself, Wiggins said "the Frost performance was less than stellar as a person who understood the evidence."

Other members of the Senate Watergate committee were reluctant to comment at all.

Senator Howard Baker (Rep-Tenn.), vice chairman of the panel and now Senate minority leader, said in advance he would not watch the program. So did Senator Daniel K. Inouye (Dem-Hawaii).

Senator Jake Garn (Rep-Utah), regarded as among the Senate's more conservative members, delivered one of the harshest reactions.

He said Nixon's comments "proved to me what I have said all along — that he was a participant in the coverup."

"I have felt from the beginning that he was guilty . . . many of his answers tonight were very flimsy . . . he split a lot of hairs," Garn said.

Representative George E. Danielson (Dem-Calif.), a strong supporter of impeachment on the House Judiciary Committee, scoffed at Nixon's involved explanation that he was not guilty of obstruction of justice because he had no "corrupt motive."

"The laws on obstruction of justice are not susceptible to his (Nixon's interpretation)," Danielson said. "When he knew what was going on and sought to conceal it, that was obstruction of justice."

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