

## Washington

**A**FTER former President Richard M. Nixon came out of isolation last year and was interviewed on television, his one-time ally and supporter, Sen. Robert J. Dole of Kansas, was asked what role Nixon might play in the Republican Party. "I don't see any active role for former President Nixon," he replied. "In time, he might become an elder statesman," the senator added, "but it takes more than four interviews to properly rehabilitate Richard Nixon."

This year, Nixon has done much more than appear on television and seems to be making every effort to get himself back into the good graces of his party and the nation. Yet Republican leaders, who are still trying to repair the damage of the Watergate scandals, are not yet ready to embrace him.

"I can tell you this," said a party official recently, "if anyone is encouraging him to run for office it is a close personal friend of his, not anyone who is an active participant in the party."

Not that the 65-year-old Nixon, who has been a fixture on the national political scene for more than 30 years, has said he would seek office again. He has on a number of occasions, however, said he thought there would be a reassessment of his administration and he has indicated to friends that he would like to have some role in the debate and resolution of public issues, particularly foreign policy.

"I don't know what the future brings," he told David Frost last fall, "but whatever it brings, I'll still be fighting."

Whether rehabilitated or not in the minds of his party, Nixon has been "fighting" recently, seeking to emerge at least as an elder statesman.

Last October, Nixon attended a Republican fundraising dinner held at a private Orange

# Nixon Is Slowly Reemerging

By John Herbers

County residence for conservatives who had contributed \$500 to the party. In an off-the-cuff talk, he said a "fighting spirit and enthusiasm" is more important to those seeking office than money, and the party should be trying to attract young, attractive candidates.

In January, he flew from California to Washington and attended the funeral of Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, the man he had defeated for the presidency in 1968, and took his place in public view beside

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President Carter and former President Gerald R. Ford, who had pardoned him for his Watergate offenses.

When friends of Carl T. Curtis held a retirement dinner in Washington last February for the Nebraska Senator, Nixon joined in the toast by telephone from San Clemente. The audience broke into applause after the well-known Nixon voice on the loudspeaker praised the senator as "a man who always fought for the principles that made this country great."

Recently newspapers across the country carried excerpts from Nixon's memoirs, which amount to a major effort to effect a national reassessment of the Nixon record. On Watergate, for example, he seeks to

show that he committed a series of tactical or judgmental errors, rather than the high crimes or misdemeanors that would be grounds for impeachment.

He has been moving around the country, involving himself with old friends and political acquaintances. He was recently a dinner guest of former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, a one-time foe. Last month, he and Mrs. Nixon flew to the Bahamas as a guest of Robert Abplanalp, the industrialist.

Earlier, there had been his trip to China in 1976 as a guest of the People's Republic while Gerald Ford was running against overwhelming odds to hold on to the presidency. The Nixon trip had an important impact on the Republican presidential primaries because it became an issue in the New Hampshire vote, which Ford barely won over Reagan. The evidence suggests that Richard Nixon may not be ready to retire quietly while others rebuild the party.

While the Nixon memoirs were on the front page in past weeks, Republican leaders mostly sought to ignore the latest reopening of the scandal that cost the Republicans dearly in public offices on both the state and national levels in 1974 and again in 1976. But what was hoped for, said one party leader, was that the Nixon memoirs would be forgotten and the former president not much in evidence by the time of the congressional election this fall and during the presidential campaigns of 1980.

The Republican Party's efforts to put Watergate behind it are hampered from time to time by recurring echoes from the past. Ford, who still bears the political stigma of having pardoned Nixon, is indicating he may be a candidate for president again in 1980, and would be hurt by a politically active Richard Nixon.

Republican leaders are



NIXON IN NEW YORK LAST MONTH

forced to acknowledge the damage of Watergate as they seek this year to win back seats in Congress Democrats never would have had without Watergate.

There is a tenacious quality in Nixon that keeps him before the public eye and causes apprehension among those who would like to see him remain in private life. In his memoirs, he seeks to show his good intentions, if not his innocence, against the mountain of evidence on the public record.

David Eisenhower, Nixon's son-in-law, said in a recent interview in the magazine *Your Place*, that Nixon stirred personal hostility because he came from California and therefore, "faced the emotional resistance and enmity of a substantial number of Americans who were uncomfortable with what California has become in the United States."

Obviously, Nixon believes this too.

It is the audacity of Richard Nixon that keeps Americans transfixed, in his restless, against-all-odds efforts to prove himself worthy even while he is laying bare his worst traits. He often said that the meaning of life was a struggle. He could never enjoy victory. After he won by a landslide in 1972 campaign for re-election he went into a blue funk and isolated himself at Camp David.

After spending months with Nixon and acting as his interlocutor in the television interviews, David Frost came to feel concern for him. In his book, "I Gave Them a Sword," Frost concluded that he was obsessed by "a thirst for nobility" that he could never achieve. By all accounts, Nixon's own "fighting spirit" is still alive, and, as restless for the struggle as ever, he is determined to keep the record open.

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