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Nixon Urged To Submit to Questioning

By Richard M. Cohen
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STATELINE, Nev., June 3—The chairman of the Republican Governors Association, Virginia's Linwood Holton, and Democratic National Chairman Robert Strauss both called on President Nixon today to submit himself to questioning on the Watergate affair through frequent press conferences.

Holton and Strauss said the President has an obligation to the American people to clear up any doubt that the public might have about his role, if any, in the Watergate break-in and the subsequent cover-up. Holton, who coupled his remarks with praise for Mr. Nixon's performance as President, said, "The press conference is the only way."

"My suggestion is that he's going to have to come several times before you guys (reporters) and be cross-examined because anything as complicated as Watergate . . . you and the public are going to have ambiguities that would need to be clarified."

Holton made his remarks in San Francisco at a special one-hour session of "Meet the Press" (NBC-WRC) held in conjunction with the 65th annual National Governors Conference, which opened at this gambling resort today.

Later, at a press conference here, Strauss echoed Holton's remarks. He, too, called on Mr. Nixon to "open up with the public" and said the press conference would be the proper forum. He said he himself was not "prepared to say

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that the President knew or did not know" about Watergate.

Gov. Marvin Mandel, chairman of the National Governors Conference, also endorsed the proposal, telling a news conference here that if President Nixon had had more "contacts with the press it would remove a lot of doubt that exists today."

"The one thing that could have been done to shore up public confidence would have been total revelation and total candor . . ." Mandel said. "That has been totally lacking."

Strauss, apparently bending over backward not to appear

partisan, said he was going to continue to urge the President to hold press conferences and answer questions on Watergate.

"I think the President needs an open discussion between the President and the press . . . more than he needs any other single thing today," Strauss said. "I think many of the questions in the public's mind may well be answered."

The public, Strauss said, wants "to believe the President . . . but he's going to have to give them a way to do it and the only way he's going to do it is to go to them."

Strauss and Holton parted company, however, on the question of whether Mr. Nixon should respond to an invitation to either appear or submit information to the Watergate grand jury or the special Senate investigatory subcommittee. Holton questioned the constitutionality of such a request while Strauss said the President should cooperate if called.

Holton, long a steadfast supporter of the President, praised Mr. Nixon's achievements in the field of foreign policy and said that Republicans should be pleased to have the President's help in their campaigns. He said it would be a mistake for Republicans to disassociate themselves from the White House and he added that Mr. Nixon would always be welcome in Virginia.

Holton did criticize Mr. Nixon for meeting with the judge at the Pentagon Papers trial while the trial was in progress. Mr. Nixon met with Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. at San Clemente to discuss his possible appointment as FBI director.

"I think the President made a mistake to meet with Judge Byrne," Holton said. "I'm not at all sure how that came about."

President Nixon has long been criticized for his failure to hold frequent press conferences. Following Mr. Nixon's May 22 statement in which he explained his role in Watergate but did not meet reporters, White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler said that a news conference would be held "in the very near future." No date has been announced.

Strauss today referred to Mr. Nixon's explanation a 4,000-word document, as a "canned statement prepared by lawyers" and said it would not "serve the purpose" of clearing up doubts about the President's role in the Watergate scandal.

Despite a heavy agenda de-

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voted to such issues as revenue-sharing, impoundment of funds and the energy crisis, Watergate and its attendant political repercussions seems certain to dominate the conference. Speaking on the "Meet the Press" show, Mandel said that the Democratic governors might pass their own resolution on Watergate when they caucus during the conference.

As usual at these affairs, there is a heavy administration presence and a number of Nixon administration officials are on hand to explain the President's position on almost any issue that will come up. But Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's participation here remains in doubt. Agnew, recently designated by the President as vice chairman of the Domestic Council, reportedly was hesitant to attend because of the uncertainty of his presidential mandate in federal-state relations. Kenneth R. Cole Jr., executive director of the Domestic Council, is scheduled to attend.

In addition, the governors will hear from Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Housing and Urban Development Secretary James T. Lynn, and the director of the Office of Management and Budget, Roy L. Ash.

The 31 Democratic governors expected here, meanwhile, were expected to push resolutions adopted at the caucus last month in Ohio. The resolutions, critical of the Nixon administration domestic policies, are bound to produce Republican opposition and may wind up pigeon-holed despite the top-heavy majority the Democrats have here.

Whether a Watergate resolution will see the light of day is another question. Despite Mandel's pronouncement, many Democratic governors do not favor the idea of a resolution and seem to agree with Strauss when he said earlier in the day that the Democrats should take "the high road."

The Governors Conference, an annual late spring rite, is being held on the shore of Lake Tahoe, a spot of magnificent beauty high in the Sierra Nevada Mountains about one block from the California border. Governors and reporters who expected to find a rustic retreat were in for a shock however, when they discovered that the conference site was a group of garish gambling casinos where the action runs around the clock.