

Governors'

Watergate

Oratory

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At the 65th annual National Governors' Conference here yesterday, everybody was talking about Watergate but nobody was doing much about it.

The 45 governors here couldn't avoid the pall of the scandal — it permeated the Lake Tahoe air and the corridors of the Sahara Tahoe, the conference headquarters.

While there were some flourishes of oratory, both pro and con, no significant action was taken by the conference. This is ironic because Watergate has put the governors in a position to reclaim the powers of the states as a voice in government, powers which have in recent years been somewhat abdicated to Washington.

The strongest words of the day came yesterday from a Democrat, Wisconsin's Patrick Lucey, who called for President Nixon's immediate resignation, and from a

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Republican, California's Ronald Reagan, who said Lucey's statement was "dangerously irresponsible."

Reagan then said, "I believe that now that this matter is before the courts and the grand juries it's time for all of us to shut up."

He was asked his reaction to a proposal by Republican Congressman Paul N. McCloskey, of Palo Alto, who announced on Sunday that he will bring up the question of looking into impeachment procedures on the House floor tomorrow.

"My reaction to everything Congressman McCloskey has done for the past couple of weeks is unprintable," the Governor answered.

Reagan had earlier addressed the governors in executive session, outlining his tax limitation proposal.

Reaction to his proposal was apparently mixed, and Reagan said "not all states are alike in their taxing methods, so what would apply to California might not apply in some other states."

But he said his plan — which would prevent future legislatures in California from raising taxes for 15 years without direct voter approval — could be transferred into a national program.

"I think we have the techniques and abilities in this country to control government spending."

Urged by the national

press to get back to Watergate, Reagan invoked closure on the subject, as he did to the Capitol press corps last month.

"I don't think any purpose is served by making statements about something where my only information comes from the newspapers," Reagan said.

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But while Reagan refused further comment on Watergate, there was no doubt that it was the main topic of conversation — if only privately — among the governors at the Sahara Tahoe here.

Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, the outgoing chairman of the Democratic Governors' Caucus, said yesterday that "Watergate was discussed at the caucus, but there was no formal resolution forthcoming from the caucus."

Bumpers was reluctant to discuss the gist of the caucus talk about the scandal, but said "many people had divergent ideas" on what form of resolution, if any, should be proposed.

The Democrats, however, probably realized they couldn't muster the two-thirds vote necessary to get a Watergate resolution through the full conference, and observers feel they decided not to waste their energy in trying.

Wendell Ford of Kentucky, the incoming Democratic Caucus chairman, asked about Lucey's call for Mr. Nixon's resignation, responded:

"I believe the governors are looking to the House to take action. It's their responsibility. I understand Congressman McCloskey is going to bring it up soon."

While there was no discussion of a resolution urging Mr. Nixon to hold more press conferences, as suggested by Virginia Republican Linwood Holton on "Meet The Press" on Sunday, Ford said: "none of us would say Governor Holton's idea is a bad one."

There were reports circulating here yesterday that Reagan had planned a private meeting with New York's Nelson Rockefeller and Washington's Dan Evans. Evans is incoming chairman of the National Governor's Conference and is considered by some to be a dark horse candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1976.

Rockefeller is widely believed to be gearing up for another run at the nomination.

And Reagan has showed a strong second-place position (to Vice President Spiro Agnew) as a GOP choice in 1976.

But, asked about the meeting talk, Reagan said: "No, I don't have any such meeting planned. They're both friends and I hope to be running into them, but I don't have any special meeting planned, or anything like that."