

Nixon Wins Praise of GOP Governors

By Lou Cannon

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MEMPHIS, Tenn., Nov. 20 — President Nixon won the praise of Watergate-weary Republican governors today by promising to document his answers to the many charges of scandal involving the White House.

Even governors who have been critical of the President's previous responses, notably Tom McCall of Oregon and Robert D. Ray of Iowa, praised him after a 90-minute session behind closed doors at the winter conference of the Republican Governors Association.

McCall, who three days ago warned against "partisan, knee-jerk reactions" in support of Mr. Nixon's position on Watergate, said after the meeting that he was "relieved both as a citizen and as a politician."

The Oregon governor raised the bluntest question of the meeting when he asked Mr. Nixon whether Republicans would be "blindsided by any more bombs" in the Watergate case.

"If there are any more bombs, I'm not aware of them," Mr. Nixon responded.

White House deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said afterward that the President did not say anything he hadn't said before "but he said it to them."

GOP governors have been grumbling for months about the difficulty of getting replies from the White House, and many of them have said that what they wanted most was face-to-face answers from Mr. Nixon. The President, in response to a criticism from host Gov. Winfield Dunn of Tennessee about poor communication by the White House, responded:

"If I have added to your burden, I am sorry for it."

Gov. Ray, who was critical of Mr. Nixon last week after a meeting of the Republican Coordinating Committee at the White House, praised him today and said the governors "felt very much better about what the President has been saying." Both Ray and Dunn said the President had promised to issue detailed statements about the White House role in the ITT case and the milk support price increase as well as about his personal finances.

There was a question on several issues about whether the governors' understanding of what Mr. Nixon will do is the same as the White House understanding.

Gov. Christopher S. Bond of Missouri said that he understood that Mr. Nixon was prepared to make available audits of his personal income tax returns but Warren, who was present at the meeting, said afterward that the President

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intended to supply information from the audits.

Both Dunn and Ray understood that the President intends to make the seven Watergate tapes he is turning over to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica available to the public.

"As far as the tapes are concerned it is my understanding that the tapes would be made available to the court and then to the public," Ray said.

This version was disputed by Warren.

"If there's a way to do it after the court gets the tapes, we'll look into it," Warren said. "There's nothing set to it." When Ray's statement was read to him, Warren added: "The President didn't say that upstairs."

Mr. Nixon also was asked by McCall about the White House version of a dispute with former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson. The President and his chief of staff, Alexander M. Haig Jr., purportedly told senators last week that Richardson had instigated the firing of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and had not told the truth to the Senate Judiciary Committee about it. Richardson emphatically denies this version.

Mr. Nixon said there was a "different recollection" that was "180 degrees apart" between Richardson's version and that of three White House counsel. But he did not elaborate, and no governor pressed him with a follow-up question on that and most other matters.

The exception was the question of Mr. Nixon's personal finances, where the President provided a run-

down that apparently was similar to the one he gave last Saturday to the Associated Press managing editors. He also talked in detail about his house at San Clemente, saying that he had spent \$137,000 for fireproof glass and \$60,000 for a fire protection system because of Secret Service requirements.

"We feel more comfortable about his personal finances," said North Carolina Gov. James Holshouser Jr. after the meeting.

The governors were ready for some "good news" today after hearing what pollster George Gallup Sr. called the "bad news" on Monday. Gal-

lup told the governors that Republican fortunes were at the lowest ebb since he began polling in 1935 and said that state and local elections would be affected by Watergate.

This was disputed today by several governors, and by Republican National Chairman George Bush, who predicted that Democratic candidates attempting to exploit Watergate in 1974 would suffer "the darndest backlash ever seen."

Mr. Nixon was greeted here on a windy, storm-threatened day by a crowd of about 4,000 persons, many bearing pro-Nixon signs. One sign said, "Save fuel, stop busing, cut taxes, hail Nixon."

Among the anti-Nixon signs in the crowd were banners saying, "the real criminals are free" and "resign you swine."

Shelby County Republicans had passed out more than 8,000 tickets for Mr. Nixon's visit here in an effort to drum up a crowd for the President.

Sixteen Republican governors and Gov.-elect Mills Godwin of Virginia attended the meeting with the President who arrived here from Key Biscayne and departed immediately for Washington after his private session with the governors.

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