

A Time to Speak

President Nixon's political situation becomes each day more untenable. The widespread confusion and lack of public trust in the Administration's statements concerning the oil shortage only demonstrate that the essential links of confidence between President and people are severed.

Yet press secretary Ziegler is once again saying that Mr. Nixon "is determined not to become consumed for another year by the Watergate matter." That has the same significance as a man with a grave illness announcing that he is determined not to be consumed by his disease. Mr. Nixon's continuance in office is no longer a matter to be decided by his own determination.

What is decisive now is the courage, integrity, and devotion to the public good of the members of the House and Senate and of leading citizens in private life. It is a time for men and women to listen to their consciences. It is a time to speak and speak plainly.

There is little doubt in Congress that Mr. Nixon was deeply involved in the Watergate scandals; but there is also a widespread feeling that it would be impolitic to come out and say so.

Mr. Nixon's remaining strength, such as it is, rests partly in public ignorance and confusion. Much of the public, unfamiliar with the procedures of impeachment, is uncertain about the political costs and implications of removing a President who has violated his oath of office. As Congressmen discovered in visiting with constituents during the past month, many voters are looking to their Representatives and Senators to exercise their best judgment and to give leadership to the country on this difficult problem.

If men and women of influence in Congress spoke their minds boldly and forthrightly, Mr. Nixon would be unable to fall back on such gasping pretenses as "Operation Candor." There would be an end to offensive and embarrassing insults to everyone's intelligence such as Vice President Ford and Senate Minority Leader Scott have inflicted upon the public in recent days with their tales about mysterious evidence that would exonerate Mr. Nixon but which he refuses to release.

Some plain-spoken leadership is beginning to emerge. Representative Thomas P. O'Neill, the House Majority Leader, rightly stated this week that the country no longer regards Mr. Nixon as a credible President and that it would be "in the best interest of the nation" for him to resign now. Representative Wilbur Mills, the influential and conservative chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, has expressed a somewhat similar judgment.

For more than nineteen months, the Watergate scandal has been poisoning the public life of the nation. This squalid, demeaning performance has gone on much too long. It is time for the leaders of both parties in Congress to do their duty.