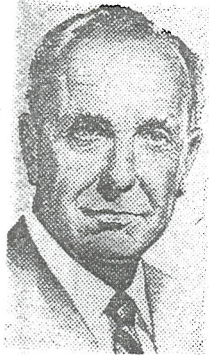


The address to Congress

By William Randolph Hearst Jr.
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NEW YORK — What struck me as possibly the most significant aspect of President Nixon's unusual State of the Union message to Congress was the frequent and friendly amount of applause he received — especially when he emphasized anew that he has no intention whatever of resigning because of the Watergate scandals.



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Some of his leading legislative enemies, of course, were conspicuous by their stony silence and dour faces. But anybody who was watching the event on television last Wednesday night saw and heard what I couldn't help conclude was irrefutable evidence that the President has a warmly sympathetic majority among the lawmakers.

This is certainly not something you could have learned from the anti-Nixonites on the tube, or the headlines they have been generating for so long. All too successfully they have been conveying to the public an impression that Nixon

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was on the verge of getting thrown out if he didn't quit first. Which gives you some idea of the power of wishful thinking in some circumstances.

Now, more than ever before, the clear fact is that the President is irrevocably determined to stay with the job that he was so overwhelmingly elected to do. And now, thanks to the applause Wednesday night, it should be equally clear to misguided millions that the possibility of his removal by impeachment is remote indeed.

It has been remote right along, contrary to that wishful thinking by the scalphunters. A poll last week by the National Broadcasting Company showed that only 90 of the 431 present members of the House of Representatives are committed to the impeachment process. This is a far cry from the majority of 216 needed to get the process in full operation.

Here, it seems to me, is a good place to try and clear up another all too common public misconception — namely, the impression that impeachment is somehow a fancy word for guilt or ouster. It is far more complicated than that. In truth, the process could easily be welcomed by the President as a way of getting clear of the Watergate mud thrown in his direction.

Impeachment of a president is very similar in operation to ordinary law enforcement procedures. In the latter a man is first suspected of wrong-doing. If the district attorney thinks he can make a case he asks for a grand jury indictment. If he gets one, then the case goes before a trial jury for determination of guilt or innocence. Right up to the verdict the accused is presumed to be innocent.

In the impeachment process the House Judiciary Committee acts as a district attorney. If it decides its present study of the Watergate maze merits the bringing of a case against the President, the President is then said to be under impeachment. The Committee formally starts the impeachment process by asking the full House to consider returning a bill of particulars. If the House votes to do so, the Senate then sits as a trial jury. Only a Senate verdict of guilty as charged, which requires a two-thirds majority vote, can oust a president.

A striking dissimilarity in the two law enforcement processes is that many of the potential grand jurors in the House and many potential trial jurors in the Senate already have their minds made up about President Nixon. And, in negation of the traditional assumption of innocence until guilt is proven, a number of those potential jurors have been insinuating guilt and showing negative bias in repeated public statements.

There obviously is a serious wrong in this, but it is seemingly unavoidable in such a political arena. The point to be made here is that it will be fascinating and revealing to see if the House Judiciary Committee decides to actually launch impeachment by asking the full House to indict.

On the basis of the present inconclusive evidence, I do not believe the committee will. If it does, somehow, I am virtually certain the House will sustain the President by the same majority indicated in Wednesday night's applause.

Nixon has the same conviction, which is why he could easily welcome impeachment as the ultimate means of getting the Watergate wolf pack off his back. Its members then would be forced to put up or shut up.

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BY AND LARGE, the President's address to Congress was more a masterpiece of self-justification than it was a reflection of the State of the Union. It told a lot about himself but glossed over immediate public concerns with the usual gung-ho optimism that everything is going to be all right.

By his personal demeanor and appearance, Nixon belied the rumors that Watergate may have impaired his health and stability. He came on strong, vigorous, in total self-possession, smiling and seemingly untroubled by anything worse than the sweltering TV lights focused on his face.

Another big plus was the restraint he used in speaking of Watergate. His words reflected none of the bitterness he could well be expected to have. There was no hint of self-pity. Instead he appeared as a man wholly convinced that he would be vindicated in his latest crisis and go on to great new deeds.

The most effective section of his speech, in my judgment, was his proud recital of major achievements by his administration. Among them, of course, are such truly historic feats as ending our combat in the Vietnam war, the turnabout in relations with China and the Soviet Union, and creation of the recent unprecedented impetus toward a permanent settlement of hostilities in the Mideast.

To listeners numbed and fed up by the daily harping on Watergate, the President's recapitulation of these and other notable accomplishments must have helped restore a much needed truer perspective on the past five years.

The address, on balance, had to create a generally favorable impression around the country. All the same, I have to admit it did not stir me personally. Nixon is simply no Churchill and never will be.

What bothered me about much of the speech was a certain extravagance of tired rhetoric, especially in the too brief discussion of domestic problems. Oratory of the campaign type is dandy for painting rosy pictures of the future. But a State of the Union message should spell out current domestic shortcomings in cold factuality and give more than a hint of detailed nuts and bolts corrections to be recommended.

Details of such corrective programs are scheduled for early release, to be sure, and one of them — on the economy — is due just after the deadline for this column. Without having seen it, I will still say that one of the biggest flaws in the speech was Nixon's failure to admit the urgency of mounting unemployment and skyrocketing inflation.

His unexplained claim that unemployment figures would be kept under control could hardly have reassured the tens of thousands recently thrown out of work by the energy shortage. And his unqualified vow that there will be no recession was reminiscent of King Canute ordering the sea to recede.

There were other flaws. For example, I wish the President would stop referring to the United States as "America." The U.S. is not "America." It is the United States of America. Calling the U.S. "America" is a common error which is deeply resented by our neighbors in Central and South America.

I also wish Nixon had gone into some detail about why he feels so confident of his eventual clearance in the Watergate mess. The public certainly expected to hear more on that subject Wednesday night. On the other hand, the President may honestly feel he has done just about all he can be reasonably expected to do in getting rid of all administration officials who have been accused, indicted or convicted in the scandals. If so, he should have said so.

There is no point in carping. It was a good speech basically, a remarkable speech in achieving its underlying aim of more support, an almost miraculous speech in that it could have been so coolly delivered in the midst of so much political heat.

It took a lot of guts.