

EX-NIXON WRITER TALKS OF SCANDAL

Huebner Says Not All Those
Involved Deserve Scorn

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 20 — Two weeks ago, on his last day as a White House speech writer, Lee W. Huebner watched horrified as a former staff colleague, Egil Krogh, Jr., said good-bye on television as he prepared to begin a Watergate-related jail term.

As he reflected on the experience, Mr. Huebner said in an interview, he concluded that while there were unquestionably people of "dubious ethical standards" in the White House, who fell naturally into Watergate, "there were also a lot of young people without great experience who found themselves straddling the line between right and wrong."

Mr. Huebner, who is 33 years old, was one of the original members of the White House writing team under President Nixon. He was something of an anomaly there, since he was one of the founders of the Ripon Society, a group of liberal young Republicans, in 1962.

He was still reluctant, so soon after his departure from the White House for a job in New York with Walter Thayer, a long-time liberal Republican fund-raiser, to deliver any general judgments about Watergate.

Not All Deserve Criticism

But he feels sure, Mr. Huebner said, that not all the Watergate participants deserve the obloquy heaped up on them.

He suggested at least one reason for the climate within the White House that may have led many staff members astray—a tendency to confuse technique with substance, of all the senior officials in Mr. Nixon's first term, said Mr. Huebner, "only Henry Kissinger managed to keep the two things in perspective—and that had a lot to do with his success."

When he began to learn of the dimensions of the scandal, the former speech writer said, he was "bewildered and surprised and skeptical and shocked and above all sad."

Nonetheless, he remains convinced, on the basis of information so far on the public record, that Mr. Nixon will neither resign nor be removed from office. The President told him during their last meeting, he said, that "this business about me quitting is nonsense."

One of the explanations for the President's determination

to hang on, Mr. Huebner suggested, is his intensive concentration on a constituency not often considered—not the American public or Congress but foreign leaders.

'Looks to Foreign Audience'

"He looks to that foreign audience," Mr. Huebner said. "Emotionally that's kind of the center of things for him, and it's where he hopes to make his mark in history. As long as they are willing to deal with him, to take his word seriously, he feels that he is in a strong position."

"The corollary, I suppose, is that if any sizable group of foreign leaders thought they detected a weakness in him that they could exploit, he would have to reassess his position rather dramatically."

Mr. Nixon's biggest triumph in his first five years in office, Mr. Huebner argued, was his foreign policy — especially im-

proving relations with China and setting out on the road toward detente with the Soviet Union. His biggest failure, the young writer added, was the creation of a huge public-relations apparatus that never worked because of the Nixonians' fear of the media, which "tended to fulfill itself."

Although the Nixon Administration has often been characterized as conservative, Mr. Huebner said that it had at least "begun a thrust" toward many of the goals of Ripon Society members and other Republican liberals, including better relations with China and the Soviet Union, a negative income tax, revenue sharing, a volunteer army and better health care.

A Difficult Task

But "it will be tough" for the President to re-establish his momentum in this three remaining years, Mr. Huebner said, and impossible unless he can find "some means to reassure the public about Watergate."

In 1974, he said, individual Republican office-holders should be able to survive "if they are identified as those who want to clean up this mess and take steps against similar abuses in the future." He mentioned as one man in this category Senator Charles H. Percy of Illinois.

But over all, he said, he ex-

pected the Republicans to lose Congressional seats.

For 1976, Mr. Huebner agreed with the prevailing judgment that Vice President Ford would be favored if he sought the Republican Presidential nomination, but he added a caveat: It will be the first time ever that the Republican hopefuls will have to "run a gantlet of a dozen primaries" such as the Democrats ran in 1968 and 1972, and that, he suggested, "might produce a surprising candidate."