

Nixon Shows Coolness, Confidence

By Lou Cannon

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A Richard Nixon who displayed the coolness under fire that he has often celebrated re-emerged last night at the President's first press conference of 1974.

From beginning to end, this self-assured and confident Nixon showed a Watergate skill in putting the best face on his worst problems and in turning hostile questions to his own advantage.

Four months ago, at his last news conference in the East Room, Mr. Nixon had bridled at even mild questioning and described the media "coverage of Watergate issues as the most 'outrageous, vicious and distorted' reporting he had ever seen.

Last night the President seemed to welcome questions about his political predicament as an opportunity to demonstrate that he had no intention of giving up the presidency, even if it meant the defeat of Republican candidates.

"I want my party to succeed, but more important I want the presidency to survive," Mr. Nixon said.

At every post-Watergate press conference until last night Mr. Nixon had never managed to overcome the temptation to lecture the press on his responsibility and to take it to task for alleged biased coverage.

Last night, some reporters attempted to lecture the President and came out second best in the process.

The most conspicuous example came when Sarah McClellon, correspondent for several Texas newspa-



President Nixon displays relaxed and conciliatory mood at press conference.

Photos by Frank Johnston and Doug Chevalier—The Washington Post

pers, repeatedly shook her pen at Mr. Nixon as she loudly informed him that his Veterans Administration director, Donald Johnson, was giving out "false information" to the American people.

"Well, if he isn't listening to this program, I'll report to him just what you said," the President replied. And as reporters joined him in laughter, Mr. Nixon continued: "He may have heard even though he wasn't listening to the program."

The President even turned a question about his disgraced and ousted former Vice President, Spiro T. Agnew, to his own advantage.

Asked whether Agnew's conduct had brought "dishonor upon his office, this administration, and the country," the President replied that Agnew had rendered "dedicated service" and had resigned because he knew

that he should not stay in office when charged with a criminal offense.

"Now at this point I am not going to join anybody else in kicking him when he's down," Mr. Nixon said firmly.

At past press conferences Mr. Nixon often demon-

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strated an ability to dismissable that undermined his credibility even with staunch supporters.

Last night, though he dodged some questions, he owned up to serious problems relating to the economy and to the energy crisis.

Even on the embarrassing question of his own taxes—an issue which has stirred the President to criticize the press in the past—he was conciliatory.

Asked whether he would pay state or local taxes in

California, the President said that it had been determined that he was not a resident for tax purposes "but would be glad to pay those taxes and of course deduct that from my federal income tax liability as others can if they desire to do so."

Only once, in responding to another tax question, did Mr. Nixon display his old proclivity to answer criticisms about his own practices by saying, in effect, that everybody does the same thing.

This came in response to a question by Martin Schram of Newsday, who read portions of a presidential tax speech to Mr. Nixon and then asked him whether he had paid his fair share of taxes.

Mr. Nixon responded by reciting a list of persons, including President Johnson, who had taken deductions

similar to the \$576,000 deduction he took for his vice presidential papers. John Kenneth Galbraith, one of those listed, issued a statement after the press conference which said tartly that he had taken a \$4,500 deduction for private papers in 1966.

"It was 100 times less than the President's and no juggling of dates was required," Galbraith said.

However, physicist Jerome B. Wiesner, now president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said he had never taken a tax deduction for the donation of any of his papers to the government, as reported by Mr. Nixon, United Press International said.

"I don't know where the 'I don't know where the President got his information but he's wrong," Wiesner said. "I have never taken an income tax deduction for any of my papers."

Mr. Nixon's most successful news conference since the Watergate disclosures was not without its other blemishes.

He appeared nervous at the outset, a characteristic Mr. Nixon frequently has shown in the early going, and he stumbled sometimes over words, once saying "impeachable defense" when he meant to say "impeachable offense."

But, with these exceptions, Mr. Nixon last night showed himself to be very much the man in charge, very much the President of the United States. For a change, he demonstrated some of the coolness he has often proclaimed.