

Nixon To Opry To Peale

By Tom Wicker

LOS ANGELES, March 18—That was a pretty good weekend parlay Richard Nixon staged for himself—Saturday night at the Grand Ole Opry, then back to the White House Sunday morning for a St. Patrick's Day sermon by the Rev. Norman Vincent Peale. If this city is any sample, Mr. Nixon's weekend dominated headlines and television screens everywhere, and there can't be too many Americans who didn't see him pounding out "God Bless America" on the Opry piano.

That's touching a lot of bases—the South, country music fans, the Irish, positive thinkers, amateur pianists and patriots. With a coalition like that, who needs the plumbers to win elections?

It has to be said for Mr. Nixon that he is most skillfully presenting a moving target these days. Only a week or so ago, it was suggested in this space that he seemed to have abandoned any effort to win back public or Congressional support, or to repair his personal reputation, and had instead opted for a determined legal effort to hang onto his office no matter what people thought of him.

Now, in an almost frenetic burst of action aimed at the public, Mr. Nixon has held two news conferences in prime time, confronted an audience of Chicago business persons who lobbed up slow balls for him to knock out of the park, and pulled off that weekend double play—Nixon to Opry to Peale—which was notable particularly in that the Tennessee end of it was nicely calculated to appeal to his vital political base in the South. Taking yo-yo lessons from Roy Acuff at

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"Taking yo-yo lessons at the Grand Ole Opry won't lose many votes in Dixie."

the Grand Ole Opry, with George Wallace looking on, won't lose many votes in Dixie, which still has 22 Senators eligible to vote in an impeachment trial.

Beyond this new, or renewed, offensive, however, there are certain harsh realities which won't go away. That was suggested again today by Judge Sirica's decision to send a sealed

grand jury report on Watergate and the cover-up to the House Judiciary Committee, which is conducting the House impeachment inquiry. In fact, in his public relations efforts, Mr. Nixon well may be making a serious tactical error by his and his staff's repeated attempts to demean and deride the committee, and by seeming to seek a confrontation on the question whether to turn over White House tapes and documents sought for the inquiry.

Vice President Ford, who knows the House as well as anyone, has warned publicly that a "totally adamant" refusal to cooperate would make Mr. Nixon's impeachment more likely. And while Mr. Ford has occasionally joined in the general Administration course against the Judiciary Committee, he is known to believe privately if Mr. Nixon wanted to be impeached, the best way to achieve it would be to defy the House's subpoena.

And although Representative Wilbur D. Mills has backed away from his suggestion that the forthcoming report on Mr. Nixon's income taxes might force him to resign, enough is known already to indicate that the report will add considerably to his troubles. Even if its specific effect is only to cause Mr. Nixon to pay additional taxes, other taxpayers are likely to feel there was an element of evasion not suitable to the Chief Executive of the Government. As it now appears, that feeling will be reflecting itself in Congressional mail at about the same time the Judiciary Committee puts the impeachment issue squarely to the House.

Another reality that neither Minnie Pearl nor Dr. Peale can long obscure is the election campaign. All members of the House, except those retiring, are running for reelection; and while, in the middle of a gasoline shortage and a surging inflation, Watergate may not be the major issue, the evidence so far suggests that it is an important issue indeed. Again, the campaign pressures thus created will be making themselves strongly felt by the time of an impeachment vote.

But the harshest reality of all is the multiplicity of indictments, guilty pleas and trials that have been set in motion by the Watergate case. Aside from the fact that such a sweeping involvement of the high leaders of an Administration in so many crimes has never before been alleged in American history; aside, too, from the virtually irresistible conclusion that the highest leader of that Administration must have known *something* of what was happening—aside from all that, the headlines and news reports these cases generate will doom Mr. Nixon's public relations efforts. He can't spend all his time at the Opry, and not even Norman Vincent Peale can make people think positively about breaking and entering.