

President Spends a Morning Acting Like a Candidate

By R. W. APPLE Jr.
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HOUSTON, March 20—President Nixon spent the morning in Houston today, following his question-and-answer session last night, acting more like a candidate than an incumbent President ineligible for re-election.

First, there was a closed meeting with about 80 Texas Republican leaders, party contributors and assorted Houston civic leaders. In keeping with his effort to show himself as a man on top of the world and the domestic situation, undistracted by Watergate, Mr. Nixon scarcely mentioned the scandal.

According to George Bush, the Republican National Chairman, who attended the meeting, Mr. Nixon got a "very supportive introduction" from John B. Connally Jr., the former Texas Governor. Others said Mr. Connally's remarks amounted to a "stick-with-Nixon" pitch.

But there was more bad news

for the Presidential effort to build public confidence in his administration, of which today's activities were a part. The latest Gallup Poll, taken before his visits to Chicago, Nashville and Houston, showed his popularity at an all-time low, with only 25 per cent of those sampled approving of his performance.

The President's rating has fluctuated very little since the beginning of 1974, hovering between 28 and now 25 per cent approval. The Gallup organization says that statistically these figures represent no change since the beginning of the year.

Of those questioned between Feb. 22 and 25 and between March 1 and 4, 64 per cent said they disapproved of the President's performance, and 11 per cent were undecided. Mr. Nixon's previous low had been 27 per cent.

Only Harry S. Truman, whose rating fell to 23 per cent in November, 1951, has scored lower since the Gallup

organization inaugurated the polls, in the Roosevelt era.

Mr. Nixon's aides said, nonetheless, that they were convinced that the President's new effort to show himself to the public would bear fruit, that they were delighted with his performance last night, and that more trips lay ahead.

The President himself was in an ebullient mood, jumping from his car to greet children who were gathered on a schoolhouse lawn as his motorcade approached the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Johnson Space Center here this morning.

He toured the area where preparations for the joint Soviet-American space flight in July next year are under way, presented medals to the Skylab 4 astronauts and then delivered an ad lib outdoor speech to hundreds of space agency employes and their families.

He praised the astronauts, praised the workers who made it possible for them to travel

through space, praised the "Russian people," praised international cooperation and praised the Clear Lake High School Band.

"A great people must always explore the unknown," he said in a spirited defense of the space program. "You need not know that something is there, in order to have justification for trying to find out what is there."

"You're only a failure," he said, perhaps with a fleeting thought to his own situation, "when you give up."

Returns to Capital

WASHINGTON, March 20 (AP)—The President returned to the White House at 3:30 P.M., Eastern daylight time.

License Plate Compromise

HOUSTON (AP)—Harry Hurt wanted to have a personalized automobile license plate with his name on it, but someone had beat him to "HURT." Mr. Hurt now sports license plates saying, "OUCH 1," on his car.



MEETING THE PEOPLE: President Nixon having a cup of coffee and talking to Marie Hamilton, a waitress at a drug store in Houston yesterday. Mr. Nixon talked with people in the street, met with Republican leaders and decorated Skylab 4 crew. Page 33.

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