

Some Representatives are Dismayed

House Reaction to Transcripts

Washington

House members who have been reading President Nixon's edited transcripts of his Watergate conversations reacted yesterday with "shock," "dismay" and "alarm" to the level of conversation in the Oval Office of the White House.

Interviews with nearly a score of members produced a strong and unanimous negative reaction to the 1254 pages of recorded talks and an opinion, much expressed, that Mr. Nixon's participation in the conversations and release of the transcripts has demeaned the office of the presidency.

But they also generally expressed the view that the transcripts have not proved that Mr. Nixon should be impeached. The House members interviewed want hard evidence of criminal or seriously improper conduct by the President.

"I can't condone the statements in the Oval Office," said Representative Marvin Esch (Rep-Mich.). "I don't run my office that way. But you can't impeach for appalling style. There must be hard facts."

Representative John Ashbrook (Rep-Ohio), a leading conservative who has criticized Mr. Nixon as being too liberal on some issues, said the transcripts don't square with the President's assurances that they would show him innocent of any involvement in the coverup of the Watergate break-in.

"I listened to him on television last Monday night and for the first time in a year I believed him" said Ashbrook. "Then I read the March 21st transcript and it was incredible, unbelievable." Mr. Nixon has said that during this conversation nearly 14 months ago that he first learned of money being paid to the Watergate burglars.

Representative Otis Pike

(Dem-N.Y.), who said he has read the entire volume and is starting through a second time, said:

"The tone is appalling. When you realize any editing that was done was obviously not done to make it sound worse, you just wonder what on earth the unedited things could possibly say that would be worse than what you've got. The image of a bunch of people in the Oval Office sitting around discussing various ways they could appear to be forthcoming ... at the same time doing everything they could not to be forthcoming ..."

Pike added, "When you compare the President's public statements at any given date with private conversations immediately prior, you know the public statements didn't mean what they said."

Representative John B. Anderson (Rep-Ill.), third-ranking House Republican leader but not close to the White House, said he was "dismayed and disheartened" by the transcripts.

"When you think that for three weeks or so (in March and April, 1973) the strategy was not to get the truth out but to minimize the political fallout ... 'wargaming' ... how to protect the White House staff ... I think it has hurt the President's case. Why those people do what they do, I'm not sure I will ever be able to understand."

Representative William Steiger (Rep-Wis.) said his "biggest disappointment is that there is no explicit statement by the President or his staff that any of the activities were morally or governmentally wrong. I don't think the transcripts conclusively establish either guilt or innocence."

Representative Richard Bolling (Dem-Mo.) said: "They offend me. They make me question whether the man has any understanding of or commitment to the democratic process. I

don't consider that the normal kind of conversation I expect a president to be involved in."

Representative Dave Martin (Rep-Neb.), among the most conservative of Republicans and part of the party leadership as ranking Republican on the House Rules Committee, said: "I think the general impression is this has hurt the President. I think the American people will be disillusioned. It should knock out the myth of King Richard."

Representative Edward Boland (Dem-Mass.) found the conversations "demeaning, alarming and shocking, particularly with respect to the office of the presidency itself. He helped himself with his speech (on television last Monday). But the more people read, the more alarmed they will be. Still, it doesn't prove guilt or innocence."

Representative George Danielson (Dem-Calif.), also a member of the committee that will recommend to the house whether Mr. Nixon should be impeached, said he found the March 21 transcript on the Watergate coverup "very damaging" to the President.

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