

Chicago Tribune

From an editorial, May 9, 1974:

We saw the public man in his first administration, and we were impressed. Now in about 300,000 words we have seen the private man, and we are appalled.

What manner of man is the Richard Nixon who emerges from the transcripts of the White House tapes?

We see a man who, in the words of his old friend and defender, Sen. Hugh Scott, took a principal role in a "shabby, immoral and disgusting performance."

The key word here is immoral. It is a lack of concern for morality, a lack of concern for high principles, a lack of commitment to the high ideals of public office that make the transcripts a sickening exposure of the man and his advisers . . .

He is humorless to the point of being inhumane. He is devious. He is vacillating. He is profane. He is willing to be led. He displays dismayingly gaps in knowledge. He is suspicious of his staff. His loyalty is minimal. His greatest concern is to create a record that will save him and his administration. The high dedication to grand principles that Americans have a right to expect from a President is missing from the transcript record . . .

Resignation of the President would be quick and simple and a qualified successor stands ready to assume office.

Impeachment is the judicial process prescribed by the Constitution for removing a President. The House can, and probably will, vote a bill of impeachment quickly. A trial in the Senate would be, and indeed should be, long and deliberate. No suggestion of haste or mob justice could be tolerated. The White House could be expected to seize every opportunity for challenge and delay, and the final outcome might be two years in coming.

The objection to resignation that has been raised—and we have raised it ourselves—is that it would not resolve the issues. It would not answer many of the questions about the President's behavior and degree of complicity. It would leave at least a suspicion that

the President had been persecuted instead of properly prosecuted out of office. To some he might remain a martyr. To many it would seem a miscarriage of justice, an example of political exorcism.

The transcripts have changed all that. Though they may clear Mr. Nixon of direct complicity in the Watergate burglary and the early stages of the coverup, nobody of sound mind can read them and continue to think that Mr. Nixon has upheld the standards and dignity of the presidency which he proclaimed himself as a candidate in 1960 . . .

We do not share the White House belief that impeachment requires evidence of a specific crime. We believe a President may be removed simply for failing to do his job, or for so discrediting himself that he loses public respect and with it, his ability to govern effectively.

It is true that this vagueness may tempt opponents to seek to remove a President for political or otherwise inadequate reasons, as they did with Andrew Johnson. But that risk must be accepted. The ultimate arbiter in this matter must be the public, and the public reaction today is clearly one of revulsion. Republican politicians are defecting in droves. The evidence against Mr. Nixon is in his own words, made public at his own direction. There can no longer be a charge that he was railroaded out of office by vengeful Democrats or a hostile press. The fundamental questions have been answered. Filling in the gaps in the transcripts can only make the case against the President stronger.

And so the objections to resignation have largely vanished.

Since the President has rejected this course, we urge the House to act quickly on a bill of impeachment. As the impeachment process progresses, as public opinion becomes clear, and as Mr. Nixon sees support dwindling in the Senate, he will have to reconsider his stand and recognize that resignation will spare the country the ordeal of a trial.