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President Tells Interviewer He'll Fight All the Way If Impeached

By Lou Cannon

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President Nixon vowed in a White House-initiated interview published yesterday to remain in office and fight for survival in the Senate if he is impeached by the House.

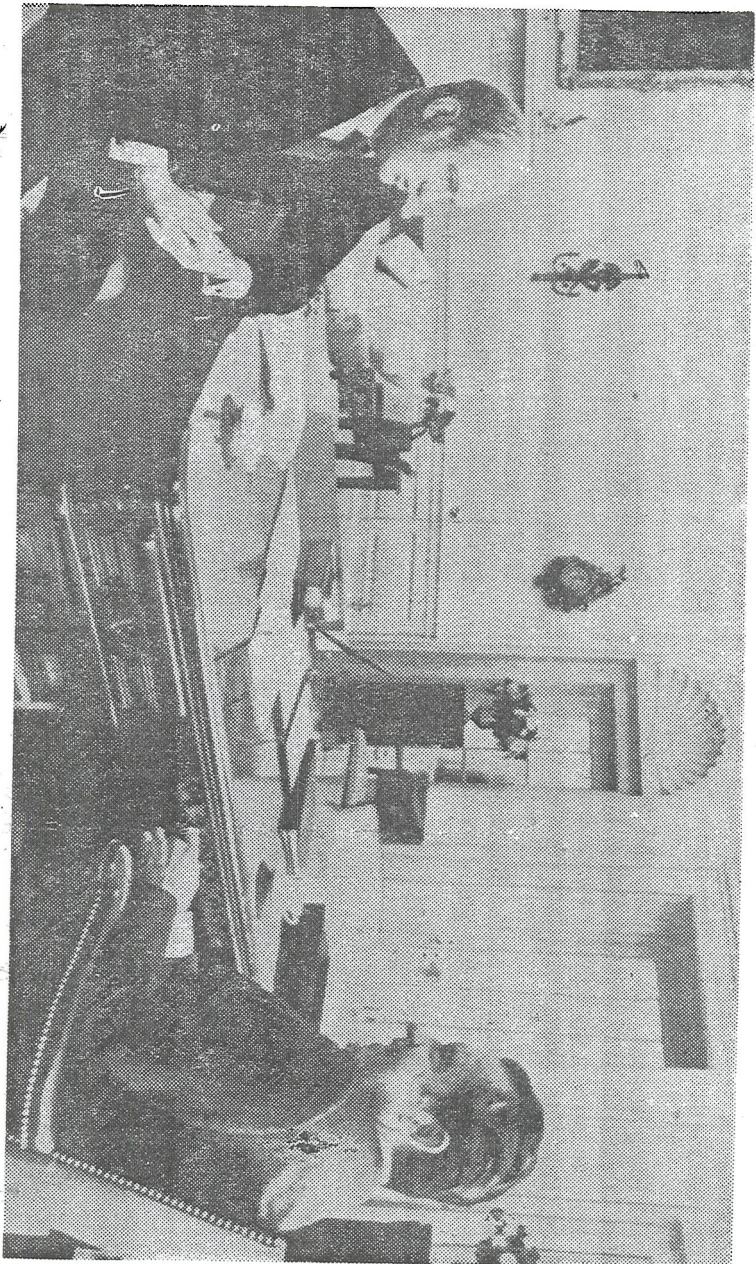
In the interview with columnist James J. Kilpatrick, the President said he had given "long thought" to the option of resigning. But he said he had discarded the idea out of a conviction that the office of the presidency would be fatally weakened if he quit.

Kilpatrick said the President was "plainly in command of his situation" and convinced that he could both manage the affairs of the country and attend to his own defense during a Senate trial. But the columnist also observed signs of deterioration.

"To this observer," Kilpatrick wrote, "it seemed evident that the President has lost some of the edge of sharp incisiveness that he exhibited a few years ago. His conversation tends to run off on tangents. A reporter, studying his shorthand notes, finds them littered with broken sentences."

At another point Kilpatrick remarked that Mr. Nixon "looked well and strong" but also "looked his full 60 years." In response to a question, the President said he sleeps very well, adding "as well as anybody at this age sleeps."

It was one of the rare



James J. Kilpatrick and the President in Oval Office . . . "plainly in command of his situation"

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personal interviews that Mr. Nixon has granted and the first since Jan. 14, 1973, was Jan. 14, 1973, when he when he met with Saul Pett of the Associated Press.

In that earlier interview Mr. Nixon stressed the importance of presidential command and said of his subordinates, "The leader has to whip them. The team goes just as fast as the leader, as the quarterback

and the coach, and I am both."

The President also claimed then that he had "never had a headache in my life and my stomach never bothers me."

In the interview published yesterday the President blamed over-delegation of authority to his aides as the "major error" in his 1972 campaign. He again discussed his physical condi-

tion, saying that he had profited from earlier crises and had therefore been able to survive Watergate without "tingling nerves and a churning stomach."

Kilpatrick, who interviewed the President for an hour and 20 minutes Tuesday in the Oval Office, left the session apparently convinced that Mr. Nixon does not intend to resign. After saying that the nation's

strength depends upon stable world leadership, the President declared:

"Resignation or impeachment would have the traumatic effect of destroying that sense of stability and leadership. And as far as this particular President is concerned, I will not be a party under any circumstances to any action which would set that kind of precedent." Mr. Nixon dismissed the

idea that he should temporarily step down under the 25th Amendment pending the outcome of a Senate trial as a "rather fatuous suggestion" put forward by people who "do not know what is going on in the world."

If the House should vote impeachment, he said, he would accept the verdict "with good grace" and proceed to defend himself in the Senate.

"It would be immensely time-consuming, but I could do it, and I would do it for reasons that are not—what do you call it—those of a reader in the ring, trying to prove himself, but I would do it because I have given long thought to what is best for the country, our system of government and the constitutional process," Mr. Nixon said.

"I am a disciplined man, and you can be sure that what would come first, even in such a trial, would be the business of this government."

Resignation would be an unwise precedent, Mr. Nixon insisted, because foreign policy in these days is made by heads of state, not foreign ministers. The President said that if he left now it would be "more difficult for future Presidents to make the tough decisions."

"I have to be here and I intend to be here," Mr. Nixon said. Kilpatrick said that Mr.

Nixon reacted with "quiet good humor" to questions except when he asked him whether he felt "betrayed" by associates who had failed to keep him informed.

"I'm not going to indulge in a conversation with you or anybody else condemning men who have given very great service to this country," he said, his voice rising in anger.

Deputy White House press secretary Gerald L. Warren confirmed that the President rather than Kilpatrick had sought the interview. Asked about it at his daily briefing, Warren said:

"The President wanted to see Mr. Kilpatrick."

In the lengthy interview, described by Kilpatrick in a 2,500-word account, Mr. Nixon also disclosed that his decisions to send American troops into Cambodia in 1970 and to resume bombing of Hanoi just before Christmas, 1972, were made over the opposition of most of his advisers.

In retrospect Mr. Nixon said that he, as well as Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, had made a mistake in taping their presidential conversations. The President said he expected that the remaining tapes of his conversations with a lady would wind up in a presidential library under guidelines that would protect his former associates from being embarrassed in their lifetimes.