

Nixon Tells Columnist He Won't Quit Or Step Aside, Even if He's Impeached

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON—President Nixon says he won't resign or step aside temporarily, even if the House impeaches him and he is tried in the Senate.

He made the assertion in an 80-minute interview in the Oval Office with syndicated columnist James J. Kilpatrick.

The President, Mr. Kilpatrick wrote yesterday, said Tuesday that after "long thought" he has decided he won't resign "under any circumstances."

"I would have to rule out resignation," Mr. Nixon said. "And I would have to rule out the rather fatuous suggestion that I take the 25th Amendment and just step out and have Vice President Ford step in for a while.

"If the House should vote an impeachment, and we go to trial by the Senate," Mr. Nixon said, he would continue as President and defend himself.

"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 toreador 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.

"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."

The session with Mr. Kilpatrick was the first exclusive interview Mr. Nixon has granted a newsman since 1972. A Nixon spokesman said the President invited Mr. Kilpatrick to come to the White House for the discussion, which Mr. Kilpatrick described as "more a monologue than an interview."

Mr. Kilpatrick, a conservative writer who has been less critical of Mr. Nixon than most columnists, wrote that the President "looked well and strong," but also seemed to have "lost some of the edge of sharp incisiveness that he exhibited a few years ago." He said Mr. Nixon's "conversation tends to run off on tangents," and

he added that his shorthand notes of the conversation are "littered with broken sentences."

Mr. Nixon said resignation, or temporarily turning the office over to Mr. Ford, would damage the nation's conduct of foreign policy and would set a bad precedent for future Presidents.

"I have to be here," he said, "and I intend to be here."

Mr. Nixon said effective foreign policy requires a strong President because heads of state, rather than foreign ministers, make foreign policy today. "I will never leave this office in a way which resigning would be, or failing to fight impeachment would be, that would make it more difficult for future Presidents to make the tough decisions.

"I will not resign, and I will, of course, present the case on impeachment before the House as effectively as we can. I shall accept the verdict in good grace. . . .

"Resignation or impeachment would have the traumatic effect of destroying that sense of stability and leadership (that is characteristic of the U.S.) 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 made these other points:

—He sleeps "as well as anybody at this age (61) sleeps," and has endured Watergate's shocks without "tingling nerves and a churning stomach."

—He won't discuss a suggestion that close aides "betrayed" him, saying, in anger, "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."

—Some activities of the White House plumbers unit, which broke into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, haven't been made public "and never will be."

—When he learned of the Watergate cover-up, he "cut off one arm, then the other arm," evidently referring to the forced resignations of his two top aides, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman.