

LONGER VERSION, LXP.

David Eisenhower Discusses Nixon

By Ann Blackman
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Richard M. Nixon's son-in-law, David Eisenhower, says the former president faces "very direct and very threatening" legal and financial problems as a private citizen.

"Right now, they're working on two things: they're trying to make a book decision, and they're fighting a legal battle," said Eisenhower, who is married to Mr. Nixon's younger daughter, Julie.

"... He's already been subpoenaed," Eisenhower said. "It's clear he has financial trouble." The possibility of a lucrative contract for a Nixon book looms as one solution to the money difficulties confronting the resigned president.

In a luncheon interview three weeks after Mr. Nixon surrendered the presidency, Eisenhower discussed the family's role in Mr. Nixon's decision to resign. He said Mr. Nixon told his family only reluctantly of the disclosure that finally forced him from office — the tape transcripts showing that he had withheld Watergate evidence.

He also said that Mr. Nixon remains "a natural resource," and that it would be a good idea if he ran again for office.

"Obviously, it depends on people's view of him," Eisenhower said. "He's a young man. He's a natural resource. He's been defen-

sive ... He's been bitter. He's been all the rest in the last year and a half. But in calmer times under different circumstances, the man has a heck of a lot to contribute. If he went into the Senate, I think it would be a good idea ... But I'm positive he's not thinking about it now."

Recalling Mr. Nixon's last days in the White House, Eisenhower said the then-president told his family about the contents of the June 23 tapes on Friday, August 2, three days before admitting publicly that he had attempted to thwart the FBI's Watergate investigation.

"It was something he didn't want to talk about with his family," Eisenhower said. "We sort of imposed ourselves on him to get to know the situation. He made the transcripts available to us."

Then, in the privacy of their second-floor White House quarters, the family gathered to discuss the personal and political ramifications of those tapes.

Julie Eisenhower, who had actively and publicly defended her father, did not feel shocked, surprised, bitter or betrayed, her husband said. "What sadness she felt ... wasn't, 'My world is exploding' or 'My forum has vanished,' but she was sad for her father, sad that the whole situation now was bringing down a presidency she thought was worth continuing; a man she loved."

Eisenhower, 26, and a second-year law student, said

he and his wife had viewed Watergate from different perspectives all along. "I was far more pessimistic than the people involved in the everyday political atmosphere ... My day-to-day exposure was with law students ... Julie's everyday experience was with supporters at rallies, political people ...

Asked if the ordeal affected their personal life together, young Eisenhower sighed. "It wasn't easy," he said.

Resignation was something Mr. Nixon had "run by us in May of '73," shortly after the president's closest aides, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, resigned in the wake of Watergate disclosures. Now, once again, the resignation option was open.

"Some members of the family thought he ought to go on," Eisenhower said, "to narrow the bill of particulars and essentially to ... enable historians ... to decide if the President should be driven from office for allegedly, or at least proven to the satisfaction of Congress, having acquiesced in the nonprosecution of aides who covered up a little operation into the opposition's political headquarters which is a practice that was fairly well established in Washington for a long time and that no one took all that seriously."

Fifteen years from now, Eisenhower said, "It's going to look pretty small, and there will be other grounds on which to judge the administration."

But the family decided that even if Mr. Nixon continued his fight to keep the presidency, "history would treat his administration just as unkindly ..."

On Wednesday, August 7, after five days of conferring individually with each mem-

ber of his family and 24 hours before he would announce his decision to the public, Mr. Nixon told his family he would resign. "Then he didn't want to hear any more about it," Eisenhower said. "So we all got together for dinner, and the topic was dropped."

By that time, Eisenhower said, "everyone made damn sure he wouldn't wake up some morning in San Clemente and say, 'I shouldn't have resigned.' He was ready to resign by the time it happened."

Reflecting on that decision, Eisenhower continued, "Watergate may have been motivated politically. I don't know. But it was a legal issue from time zero ... Within certain limits, you could go out and attempt to garner all the political support you wanted, but if you were losing the battle on the evidence, it was going to get you, unlike casualty figures in Vietnam or rhetoric about the silent majority."

And the President, said Eisenhower, was losing on the evidence. "I see no question about it. I think that's why he resigned."

Asked whether he thinks Special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski should prosecute his father-in-law, Eisenhower said tersely, "I'd rather not get into that at all ... I don't think I or any other member of my family should go running around making comments on the legal aspects of the thing."

Then he went on to say, "The legal system cracked the case. This is the thing you can never escape. However political it was, the legal system cracked it ..."

In his own mind, Eisenhower said, he views those who became entangled in Watergate "as not so much a gang of felons that were out to subvert the Constitution but by and large people who walked into and indulged in accepted practices within the unwritten rules of executive D.C. which had developed over four years

"Maybe it was the personality of Richard Nixon that inspired it. But in either case, I don't think the individuals involved are on a par with Herman Goering, Joseph Goebbels, Rudolph Hess."