

CONVENTION FEELS WATERGATE TOLL

Nixon's Name Is Mentioned Only Regretfully by Those Who Want to Forget

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KANSAS CITY, Mo., Aug. 16.—Two years and one week after he resigned the Presidency, Richard M. Nixon was a nonperson at the nominating convention of the Republican Party he had dominated so long before his fall.

His picture was nowhere in evidence as the party's first post-Watergate convention opened in Kemper Arena. His name was uttered, if at all, only in the most regretful and hushed tones. The single reference to him, a tribute to his China policy, was stricken from the draft of the party platform.

But Watergate, the scandal that elevated Gerald R. Ford to the Presidency and helped precipitate the contest with Ronald Reagan for the remnants of the party it shattered, hovered and occasionally descended on the convention trying to forget it.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., who rose to national attention through the Senate Watergate inquiry three years ago, mentioned the unmentionable in the prepared text of his keynote address tonight. Yet even that reference, an attempt to persuade the nationwide television viewers that Watergate was an aberration the party would never again tolerate, caused complications.

White House Editing

Rogers C. B. Morton, the chairman of President Ford's campaign, told reporters today that "some editing" was attempted by the White House and the Ford campaign staff to reduce the extent of the Senator's rueful recollections.

Mr. Ford, locked in a struggle for the party's Presidential nomination with Ronald Reagan, said in the primary contests that he had stopped mentioning the name of his predecessor because Watergate was something the American public would as soon forget.

When Mr. Baker showed a draft of his speech to the President's advisers it struck them, Mr. Morton said, that "in rough draft there was more reference to Watergate than there needed to be."

"I suggested that it be minimized," the campaign chairman said. The same suggestion was made, it was reported, by David Gergen, the White House director of communications, who, ironically, had been Mr. Nixon's last chief speech writer.

Mr. Morton said that specific sentences had been proposed as candidates for excision by the Senator. But Mr. Morton never quite said that Mr. Baker, one of Mr. Ford's prospective running mates should the President win the nomination, had acceded to all of the editing suggestions.

When Mr. Baker's draft was completed, it contained several allusions to the scandal, blaming the Democrats for "rattling the dusty, old skeleton of Watergate," and declaring, in hopeful phrases, that the American people knew better than to believe those who "pretend that one party or one person has had a monopoly on mistakes."

A spokesman for the Senator said the last draft was tightened but that no Watergate material had been trimmed. "I think it's stronger now than it ever was," said Ron McMahan the aide.

A similar process was used to "coordinate" the convention addresses tonight by Vice President Rockefeller and by Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, according to the campaign chairman.

Watergate Remains a Factor

Despite all the efforts, it seemed clear that Watergate and the blemish it left on the Republican Party would not easily be erased.

Walter J. Hickel, the former Secretary of the Interior who was dismissed by Mr. Nixon long before Watergate, traveled here from his Alaska home with one stated purpose: to do what he could to keep John B. Connally off the party ticket. The former Texas Governor and former Secretary of the Treasury, who was exonerated in court of bribery charges from the Watergate period, continues to be pursued by intimations of an unsavoriness because of those charges and his former ties to Mr. Nixon.

Just before the platform committee adopted the raft of the document outlining the party's philosophy and goals on Friday, Harold R. Sterling, a Reagan delegate from Tennessee, urged the inclusion of a morality plank.

It should, he proposed, damn the alleged misconduct of some Democrats in Congress as well as those who took part in the Watergate affairs and any other "unpardonable" allusion to the pardon granted to Mr. Nixon by his chosen successor.

John Deardourff, a professional Republican campaign consultant, has suggested in all seriousness that the party would be better off, as the bearer of the burdens of the Hoover Depression and now the Nixon scandal, if it changed its name.

But as Mr. Morton stated it here today, "if you can sweep Watergate under the rug, you've got a hell of a big broom."