

Nixon May Be Eyeing a Limited Return

By Lou Cannon
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Twenty-eight months after he resigned from the presidency rather than face impeachment proceedings, Richard M. Nixon is behaving like a man who believes he can rehabilitate his reputation and make at least a limited re-entry into public life.

"I think you're going to see a lot of President Nixon on the scene in 1977," said a Southern California friend, who said he had spoken with Nixon recently. "Without knowing exactly what he is going to do, I get the impression that he thinks a lot of people are willing to look at the good things about him as well as the bad."

This impression [?] is reinforced by a series of telephone calls Nixon made

penetrating analysts of the presidential election campaign.

Nixon telephoned Dole at his Watergate apartment after the election.

"He wanted me to know I had a couple of friends in San Clemente and that he thought I'd done a good job in the campaign," Dole said.

Nixon reportedly also telephoned former Sen. Edward J. Gurney of Florida to congratulate him after he was acquitted of perjury charges Oct. 26.

And Nixon has talked to several close friends in California. One of these friends said the former President was "in very good spirits and looking forward to the publication of his book."

Nixon's deadline for completing the book is now Jan. 9, 1977, the date of his 63d birthday. The book is scheduled for publication next fall and for serialization beforehand in The New York Times.

But Nixon's public re-emergence will occur before then, next April and May, in a series of four still-to-be-taped 90-minute television interviews with David Frost. Nixon was paid \$600,000 for the interviews.

The Nixon is selling great store by

these interviews," said a friend. "He believes that the public is now ready to put the mistakes he made in perspective and listen to his side of the story."

This reference to "mistakes" is consistent with the view Nixon always has taken about the Watergate case, which Nixon often has referred to as an error in judgment without ever accepting criminal responsibility, even after he was pardoned by President Ford.

Republican officeholders seem to be of two minds about Nixon. On the one hand most of them are worried that any Nixon emergence will keep active the Watergate issue, which severely damaged the party in the 1974 and

1976 elections. On the other hand some Republicans see Nixon as having some future role in foreign affairs.

Dole said in an interview this week that he thought that Nixon might be acceptable in dealing with foreign issues because even his adversaries concede "he did a lot of good things in this area." The senator said he did not believe that Nixon would be able to play a domestic role.

A similar comment was made by

Rep. Charles L. Wiggins (R-Calif.), who was one of Nixon's staunchest defenders on the House Judiciary Committee until a tape showed that Nixon had tried to squelch the Watergate investigation a few days after the break in.

"It's inevitable he's going to come out at some time," said Wiggins. "I don't expect him to remain a recluse."

Wiggins invited Nixon to play golf at a Republican hand-rolling tournament last June. Nixon accepted the invitation but canceled it when his wife suffered a stroke on the day of the tournament. Wiggins said he has not had a conversation with Nixon since the discussion of the tournament.

But Vander Jagt held long conversations initiated by Nixon during and after the campaign.

Nixon first called Vander Jagt Oct. 12 to congratulate the Michigan congressman for his debate performance on public television against Brademas and praise him in extravagant terms.

Vander Jagt was not in the office when Nixon called. Instead, the fax

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mer President talked to the congressman's secretary, Margaret Treanor, who made stenographic notes of the conversation.

"I just wanted him (Vander Jagt) to know I thought he clobbered him (Brademas)," Treanor quotes Nixon as saying. "He is the greatest television personality I've ever seen."

When Treanor offered to locate the congressman so that Nixon could tell him himself, Nixon replied that she shouldn't bother him on a day when he was busy campaigning.

"Sometime late in the day, when perhaps he is weary and tired from the trials of campaigning, give this message to the congressman; it might cheer him up a little," Nixon said.

Vander Jagt said the message, given him late that night when he reached his hotel in New York after a day of campaigning, accomplished precisely this purpose.

"It gave me a shot of adrenalin," says Vander Jagt, who promptly called Nixon to thank him. The two men held a lengthy conversation and another conversation after the election.

What Vander Jagt remembers best from the discussion, he said, is Nixon's advice to skip the party rallies in favor of getting on television at every possible opportunity.

"He said he had been to many more banquets and rallies than I would ever go to and that I was just wasting my time at them," Vander Jagt recalls. "He said the tube is where it's at, and that's where I should be."

Some friends of Nixon warned that it is premature to assess his course of action until the Frost interviews are seen by the American people. One person who is close to Nixon said the former President has "no illusions" about the difficulty of assuming a public role.

But the consensus of those who have talked to Nixon is that he now seems convinced that the American people are willing to view him more charitably than they did when he resigned from office Aug. 9, 1974. In the waning days of the Ford administration, Nixon appears ready to launch a campaign to restore his discredited image.