

# The GOP Outlook for '76

WASHINGTON — As the Watergate maelstrom swept toward its late April climax, Vice President Spiro Agnew managed to leak word that he was "appalled" at the whole sad episode.

Appalled, yes, but also probably amused, because many of the White House aides implicated are the Vice President's enemies, people whom he detests and who detest him. They have made his four years as Vice President as miserable as they could, describing him as a "clown" and maneuvering to dump him from the 1972 ticket. Their hostility doesn't matter much now; on the contrary, it's something of a badge to show primary voters and delegates to the 1976 GOP convention.

**NOR IS SPIRO AGNEW** the only GOP presidential hopeful whose prospects look different because of the Watergate mess and its political fallout. Others are affected, too — like former Treasury Secretary John Connally, whose national future may be rapidly clouding. Connally is Richard Nixon's apparent personal favorite for the 1976 nomination, but that imprimatur is worth less now than it was two or three months ago. Moreover, the Watergate scandal has obliged Connally to delay his privately advertised conversion to the GOP, and this coyness is causing Republican politicos to refer to him as "Chicken Little" or worse.

Nelson Rockefeller came a-cropper with his fumbled attempt to run former Robert Wagner, a Democrat, as the Republican nominee for Mayor of New York in the November elections. Even, so, the Watergate backlash might make Rocky a more plausible GOP presidential candidate if he

weren't so old (68 in 1976). As for Chuck Percy of Illinois, the fact that the White House dislikes him counts for less now, but the continuing hostility of party regulars seems as prohibitive as ever.

Strategists for California Governor Ronald Reagan are privately amused by the White House's Watergate agonies, especially because the Reagan high command includes many Republicans with long-standing factional animosity toward the California Nixon clique. While Reagan's presidential prospects may or may not look auspicious after he leaves the governorship in January, 1975, there is now little chance that the Californians around Nixon can scuttle Reagan by taking over the Golden State in 1974. Implicated Waterbugger Jeb Magruder's ambitions to become California Secretary of State were smashed weeks ago, and the disrepute of the top California staffers around Nixon may rub off on the 1974 gubernatorial plans of former White House counselor Robert Finch, a longtime Reagan foe.

**LURKING BEHIND** these individual situations is the overall probability that President Nixon will now have less influence in picking the 1976 GOP nominee. Even before the Watergate, congressional leaders were already beginning to raise the "lame-duck" image, and that attitude can be expected to grow in direct proportion to the amount of damage the President suffers in coming months.

One thing we may safely say: There is not much chance that the 22nd Amendment will be repealed so that Mr. Nixon can run for a third term in 1976.