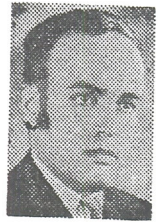




Rowland Evans and Robert Novak



Nixon's Senate Campaign

PROVIDENCE, R.I.—President Nixon promised John Chafee months ago to help make a U.S. senator out of the former Republican governor and Navy Secretary, but the actual decision that a presidential campaign stop here was necessary came only ten days ago, a clear signal that liberal Democratic Sen. Claiborne Pell had moved ahead.

Moreover, Mr. Nixon's bold invasion of Rhode Island Friday on behalf of the articulate and charismatic Chafee broke a cardinal dictum privately laid down by the White House months ago. The dictum: Mr. Nixon would not campaign in any state where an incumbent Democratic senator was running for reelection.

For Mr. Nixon, that dictum made political sense. With anti-McGovern Democrats moving toward the President in vast numbers, he would risk alienating part of this potential Democratic vote by intervening in Senate contests on behalf of Republican candidates. In retaliation,

some Democrats might change their mind about voting for Mr. Nixon.

Yet that risk was perceived in the White House as well worth taking, even in overwhelmingly Democratic Rhode Island, when Chafee decided that the hoopla and excitement of a presidential visit would give him a much needed shot of adrenalin in the closing days of the campaign.

THE REASON the President agreed to sacrifice some of his own lead over Sen. George McGovern (an astonishing 19 points, according to The Providence Journal poll published last Thursday) is obvious. He has now decided that control of the Senate in the 93rd Congress is critically important. With his own huge lead apparently still intact, he decided he could afford to risk some Democratic hostility.

Control of the Senate means control of legislation, committees and—most important—the Senate's investigative powers. If the Republi-

cans gain five seats, making the Senate 50-50, the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Spiro Agnew would give them control, spiking a full-fledged Senate probe of the Watergate scandal under Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Thus, in addition to his airport rally here, Mr. Nixon also added stops in North Carolina, Oklahoma and New Mexico, three other states with key races that could determine control of the Senate next January.

OF THE four Democrats running in these Senate contests, Pell is the only incumbent. When Mr. Nixon arrived, Pell was not only moving into the lead but also offering no exposed positions for attack by Chafee, whose bland campaign theme is simply that Pell is "ineffective." Moreover, Chafee himself concedes that one of Pell's chief assets is beyond political attack.

That asset is the "penance vote"—Democrats forsaking McGovern in unprecedented numbers who will vote for

Pell to save their consciences.

There is no way for Republicans to deal with this phenomenon. Worse yet for Chafee, Republican strategists are fearful that anything but a soft-glove approach to the austere, aristocratic Clairborne Pell would boomerang because Pell has become an institution here. He is the last of the Democratic WASPs in a state dominated by Italian Catholics. The result is a campaign of soporific civility that would please the Marquess of Queensbury.

Hence, Chafee's decision to invite the President. His chance to become the first Republican elected to the Senate from Rhode Island in 42 years now hangs on the mundane nuts-and-bolts politics: enthusiasm, organization, voter-identification and getting every possible Chafee voter to the polls.

What happens Tuesday after Mr. Nixon's media extravaganza Friday will tell something about Mr. Nixon's coattails—but a lot more about control of the Senate.

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