

SF Examiner GOP rumbles about

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WASHINGTON — For the first time, powerful Republicans are taking seriously the prospect that President Nixon will not finish out his term.

Nixon has bounced back from many a crisis in his long and turbulent career, but this time Republicans fear he may not be able to.

His angry, fighting press conference Friday night and his successful handling of the Mideast crisis could win him a brief respite.

But the odds that the President will either resign or be impeached, which until a week ago seemed only a remote possibility, have now lengthened significantly.

One senior GOP senator said if a ballot were taken today, the House would vote to impeach. He probably would rather resign than go through the ordeal of a trial by the Senate, the senator believes.

Another Senate Republican compared Nixon's current situation to that of Spiro Agnew a few weeks ago, when he was protesting his innocence while secretly negotiating his resignation. This senator predicted the President might do something similar.

Significantly, this kind of comment is coming from well-informed Republican lawmakers and party leaders who have stuck with the President through other hard times.

Publicly, many are still reluctant to criticize him. Privately, they are dismayed at his conduct, which they feel has badly damaged the country and their party.

One of the few who was willing to be quoted by name, Sen. William B. Saxbe (R.-Ohio), said flatly: "Nixon is through, finished, in terms of his effectiveness."

"The damage is deep and very serious," said another midwestern senator, who asked to remain anonymous. "I don't know if he can recover."

A well-placed eastern Republican said the damage to the President is "incalculable."

"I feel he may not finish out his term," he said. "His character is to tough it out, but I'm not sure he's going to."

A border state Republican leader said: "Unless (former Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald) Cox was really so close to something that Nixon had to fire him, I think the President might still be able to stay in office. But he's so diminished in clout now that he may continue to be just some sort of eunuch."

These Republicans reflect a cataclysmic and perhaps irreversible shift in public opinion.

The midwestern senator said that "an awful lot of dedicated Republicans are now saying Nixon ought to be impeached. It's going to be hard to change their minds."

Mississippi's state Republican chairman, Clarke Reed, militantly conservative and staunchly loyal to Nixon, said the reaction "really floored me."

"I'd like to say it's just the normal reaction of the liberals and people who never liked Nixon anyway," Reed.

Nixon's survival

said. "But I have to agree that there's real disenchantment among the people who are not normally disenchanted. It's not just the opposition from Nixon-haters."

The hostile reaction spanned the political spectrum—from traditionally Republican lawyers in New York, to Wallaceite farm folk in Arkansas, to disenchanted "hard hats" on a Maryland construction site.

About a quarter million telegrams flooded into Washington in the week since the "Saturday night massacre" that forced out Cox, Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and his deputy, William D. Ruckelshaus. The sentiment was overwhelmingly against the President.

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His unexpected surrender of his Watergate tapes last Tuesday helped very little because, as one GOP senator pointed out, "The way he did it, he couldn't get any credit for it."

The office of Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott reported mail running eight to one against Nixon. The assistant GOP leader, Robert Griffin, was getting a 12-to-1 negative count. Some democrats reported even more spectacular odds of 50 to 1.

The White House received more than 10,000 telegrams, but unlike happier times it is declining to say how they went.

Preliminary opinion polls confirmed the anti-Nixon surge.

A CBS poll on Wednesday turned up 48 percent who thought Nixon should resign, while only 39 percent wanted him to stay.

Only a minority favors the more drastic step of impeachment, but Dr. George Gallup's percentages on that question have been creeping upward ominously: 19 percent in June, 24 in July, 25 last August, and 31 in a poll taken last weekend.

The smaller, less precise CBS poll found 43 percent in

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favor of impeachment, almost as many as the 46 percent opposed.

The President, of course, scoffed Friday night at suggestions that he might be impeached and stoutly insisted he has no intention of quitting.

There are a number of reasons why Nixon's latest crisis is worse than any that have gone before.

For one thing, his personal integrity and the honesty of his close friends are now on the line.

One Republican senator said people who were willing to tolerate the Watergate scandal as "just politics" are put off by reports of lavish government spending on Nixons' homes, by serious allegations of financial hanky-panky involving his friend C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, and by the peculiar handling of a \$100,000 contribution from billionaire Howard Hughes.

"A lot of people are wondering whether Cox was getting too close to him," the senator said.

The worse Nixon is hurt, the harder he struggles, but in the eyes of many Republicans, his struggles only hurt him more.