



Why Nixon Needs Only 34 Per Cent

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JUST BEFORE leaving for the West Coast, President Nixon met with everyone in the White House who has duties connected with his legislative program. "Just remember," he told them, "on most issues this year, we don't need 51 votes, 33 plus one will be enough."

The President was speaking of the Senate, with its 100 voting members. The meaning of his fairly chilling remark is that in most arguments with Congress that he could foresee, he would use his veto and therefore does not feel the need of a normal majority. The need is for no more than "33 plus one" — or just the minimum required to sustain a Presidential veto.

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AS MATTERS now stand, the Senate is fairly unlikely to give him his "33 plus one" on all sorts of questions this year.

That may change, of course, as the President keeps hammering home the cruel claim that he is against waste, against inflation and against higher taxes, while the wicked Democrats in Congress favor all three of these evils, because they are the mere creatures of so many special interests.

In any case, although the President had the Senate in mind at the time, the real point of the President's grimly determined remark to his staff goes far beyond the Senate. The Senate, after all, cannot override a presidential veto without the help of the House. Both chambers must

produce a two-thirds anti-Nixon majority to get results.

Here, one must add, is where the universal interpretation of a recent test vote in the House has been downright grossly misleading. REAP — the obscure Rural Environmental Aid Program of the Agriculture Department — was the subject of the test. Incredibly enough, REAP was actually chosen for a first test by the House Democratic leadership because it looked like a good chance to beat the tar out of Richard M. Nixon, who has ruthlessly cut off all funds for the program.

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YET THE final vote was only 251 for REAP, 142 against, and 38 not voting.

REAP will surely pass the Senate, but the President will just as surely veto it. Moreover, the pro-REAP forces were more than a score of votes short of the two-thirds needed to override a presidential veto. On a vote to override, moreover, Minority Leader Gerald Ford and the other White House stalwarts are sure they can do better than they did in last week's test.

There are some possible exceptions, like certain bills to subsidize medical research, where a vote against could be interpreted as open support for more and more heart attacks. But over-all, the recent REAP vote is considered by all insiders as decisive proof of the President's power to veto over and over again, in the supposed constitutional crisis over spending bills that will unquestionably pit the President against the Congress.