

A Republican's Conscience

By Lowell P. Weicker Jr.

WASHINGTON—What kind of mentality is it that accepts Watergate, surveillance, disruption and political espionage as proper Presidential election tactics?

The obvious answer is: those persons convicted in the Watergate break-in. Other answers might range from philosophical zealots to steady practitioners of such dirt. But have we come to the point where the answer is, the American people?

Because if the answer is no, it will mean that certain planners of the Republican Presidential effort of 1972 made a terrible error in evaluating the level of political integrity expected by Americans and no politician will try a repeat.

But if the answer is yes, then those planners were correct and 1972 marks a historical watershed of gutter politics becoming proper politics.

The nation—Democrat, Republican and independent—has retreated and retreated and retreated as to integrity of thought and deed. Disregard for high standards of propriety and ethics in Government has extended itself to the point where persons commit political espionage, surveillance and disruption without equating such action with any risk, and the public responds to the I.T.T.'s and Watergates with "so what? It goes on all the time." Well, let me disabuse the public of this myth. It doesn't go on all the time or even one-hundredth of the time.

So let's not have someone take a barroom myth and make it a national model of campaign tactics. The issue squarely before the American people with Watergate is not whether everybody's doing it but whether everybody will do it.

Already I note the Administration responds to queries about unusual behavior of White House and Committee to Re-elect the President aides with a standard "so-and-so denies any knowledge of Watergate." That is possibly technically correct, but I want the American people to understand that it is not an answer to the question of whether these individuals played by a new set of rules that disregarded American concepts of fair play.

Why get so steamed up over this



Larry Ross

aspect of the issue? Because it goes to the heart of America's strength. As Connecticut is a small state within the United States, so our nation, by its head count, is small in the world. But we have attained a strength and respect way beyond our numbers because we believe in ourselves as an honest, idealistic, humane people. As long as we think that way, some portion of that image will come true in America every day.

If I and my colleagues on the committee fail in telling the story in such a fashion as to arouse America's basic honesty and idealism, then the odious tactics that have been flaunted before the American public will de facto become the rules for American elections.

Now, to shift from the choice that confronts all Americans to the choice that specifically confronts Republicans. As a Republican I wish I could say there was no Watergate break-in, that those convicted worked for the Democratic National Committee and that

the Committee to Re-elect the President didn't exist.

Unfortunately there was, they didn't, and it did (and still does).

This is 1973 and the old politics of hunkering down in bad times or dealing ourselves out or ducking by doctrine are not going to fly. It is true the public, to its shame, did not get aroused when Watergate or I.T.T. occurred. But make no mistake as to what's going on today.

That American decency, idealism and honesty that some have thought bought off is stirring and convening. I don't believe our fellow citizens are hypocritical to the point of blaming one party — ours — for occurrences which caught an entire nation acquiescing. So Republicans need not fear Watergate; they can actually turn it into political credibility by treating it in a hard-nosed truthful way.

But if we go the way of cover-up, or silence, we will assure minority status for years to come. And if that were not the consequence, as Americans we really ought to be worried.

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Responding to the Obvious

To the Editor:

To Senator Weicker's "A Republican's Conscience" [Op.Ed April 16]: I am the public. I was aroused. I did not acquiesce. I'm not ashamed, and there were about 29 million of us, Senator. I'm sorry about you, but there was many a voice hollering in the wind last fall (pre-Nov. 7).

To hear some prominent Republican voices finally responding to the obvious is consoling—but not very.

MARTHA B. CANNON
Wyckoff, N. J., April 16, 1973

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