

## The Watergate Affair

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# Demos Ponder a Response

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON — Democratic party leaders are now seriously considering this unique political response to the national disaster of Watergate: Buy network TV time, call for national unity, avoid recriminations and demand ruthless and complete exposure of all the squalid facts.

No final decision has been reached, and Party Chairman Robert Strauss may decide that the time is not quite ripe for such an appeal. The purpose would be to put the Democratic Party on the side of the angels and to make a vivid demonstration of steering clear of normal partisan exploitation at the expense of President Nixon.

### Fear Backlash

In short, such party leaders as Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, of Massachusetts, Gov. Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, chairman of the Democratic Governors Conference, and others — led by Strauss — are fearful that traditional partisan efforts to cash in on Nixon's extreme and painful vulnerability could backlash, causing Republicans to reform their lines around Nixon. But worse, they fear that the President's vulnerability means that the United States is also extremely vulnerable. A President stripped of his power by Watergate is a country similarly stripped of its power.

Strauss, who has turned down recent invitations to go on national television shows so as to avoid any charges of

exploiting a national crisis for partisan gain, would not himself take part in stating the Democratic Party's position on national TV.

### Party Leaders

Too obviously political himself, he would invite such party leaders as Bumpers, perhaps the esteemed Sen. John Stennis of Mississippi, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, or another influential senator, and a leading House Democrat to state the party's case.

That case: Appeal for national unity on grounds that there is only one President; pledge Democratic support for any clean-up or reform the President wanted to institute, particularly in the field of campaign spending; and demand total disclosure of Watergate and attendant scandals — but no political or moral judgments. The voters, say the Democratic leaders, will have plenty of facts to make such judgments without help from any Democrat.